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Unpaid Care Work in Rwanda: NGOs' actions towards women's empowerment

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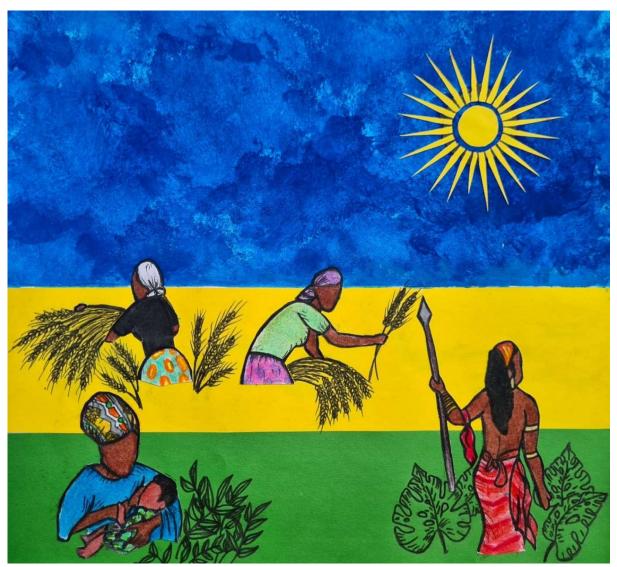
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A papá: "se lo dedico"

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Abstract

Rwanda is a leading country in gender equality indicators such as women's political participation and health. However, women's status remains largely defined by unpaid care work (UCW), a phenomenon that threatens women's access to education, income, and well-being. To promote gender equality, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have implemented initiatives towards recognising, reducing, and redistributing UCW. This study analyses the approaches of five selected NGOs upon women's UCW in rural Rwanda and focuses on how conducive they are to the promotion of women's empowerment, based on Kabeer's (1999) and Moser's (1989) theories on women's empowerment. This research included semi-structured individual interviews developed remotely, and the revision of NGOs' reports and the National Gender Policy. The results indicate common approaches by the chosen civil society organisations regarding unpaid care work. First, they consider that UCW Recognition implies perceiving care not (only) as an obstacle but (also) as an empowering force. Second, they promote UCW Reduction strategies that give women access to resources and other opportunities, but that can also create a discourse of 'reduce to produce' that threatens women's agency. Third, they support UCW Redistribution as a key catalyser of gender equality by supporting women's empowerment and further social changes. The joint work of the NGOs and the government can foster the transformation of Rwanda's gender equality model, so it responds to challenges such as women's empowerment and the elimination of intimate partner violence. This research aims to contribute to academic literature in gender and development by presenting a case from the Global South.

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List of Abbreviations

AAR	ActionAid Rwanda
CEPAL	*Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe*, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DLD	Domestic Labour Debate
GAD	Gender and Development
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEM	United Nations' Gender Empowerment Index
GPD	Gross Domestic Product
HAI	Human Assets Index
HDI	Human Development Index
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
LDC	Least Developed Country
MIGEFASO	Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Affairs
MIGEPROF	The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion
MIGEPROFE	Ministry of Gender and Women Promotion
MRND	National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSD	Norwegian Centre for Research Data
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
RWAMREC	Rwanda Men's Resource Centre
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
UCW	Unpaid Care Work
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WEF	World Economic Forum
WID	Women in Development

1. Introduction

According to UN Women (2016), women perform 2.5 times the unpaid care work (UCW) men do. Indeed, even in countries with a narrow gap, such as Norway, women's participation in the UCW is almost twice as that of men (World Economic Forum, 2019). This phenomenon has traditionally been associated with women's economic disadvantages, though the consequences of the gendered structures of care also impact women's development and empowerment. Unpaid care work is to a great extent responsible for women's reduced access to education, income, and health. Nonetheless, contrary to other inequalities such as the increasing gender pay gap, the scant female participation in formal employment, and the escalating financial disparities—commonly predominant in highly gender unequal countries—UCW feminisation is still a worldwide problem (WEF, 2019; UN Women, 2016).

Rwanda, a leading country in gender equality indicators such as women's political participation and health (WEF, 2019), is still a "highly patriarchal society" when it comes to UCW (Rohwerder, Müller, Hossain & Nyamulinda, 2017, p. 2). Despite being the country with the largest female participation in parliament (WEF, 2019), women's status remains largely defined by motherhood and caregiving (Doyle, Kato-Wallace, Kazimbaya & Barker, 2014). Consequently, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have implemented initiatives towards recognising, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care work with the main objective of promoting women's empowerment and gender equality (Rohwerder et al., 2017; Doyle et al, 2014). This research analyses the perspectives and actions of the NGOs working in rural Rwanda in light of the theories of women's empowerment. By studying how one of the countries with the narrowest gender gaps is addressing UCW, this research aims to contribute to academic literature in gender and development from a Global South perspective.

This text will be developed as follows. First, I present a background chapter where I introduce key facts on Rwanda's history, specifically the way gender roles have evolved during recent years, the relationship between unpaid care work and gender equality, and the objectives of this study. Subsequently, I address the theoretical and conceptual debates related to unpaid care work and the ideas of empowerment in gender and development academic literature. In the Methodology chapter, I explain the research activities developed to address the research objectives. Thereafter, I discuss the findings of the study and how they align with the theories on women's empowerment. Finally, I draw the conclusions regarding NGOs' perceptions and actions on unpaid care work in rural Rwanda, and why they are important when reflecting on gender equality.

2. Background

2.1. Rwanda's recent history

Rwanda is a land-locked country located in Eastern Africa surrounded by the Great Lakes, and with an area of 26,670 sq. Km. With a population of around 12.6 million, Rwanda is, together with its neighbour Burundi, the most densely populated country in Africa (World Bank, 2021a). The country's political division includes four provinces and a capital city, Kigali, which are subdivided into 30 districts (Ministry of Local Government, 2021). Rwanda has an estimate of 83% of the total population lives in the rural areas (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2014), and 70% of the population works in subsistence agriculture (Hutt, 2016). The official languages of the country are Kinyarwanda, English, French, and Swahili (UNICEF, 2017). With a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.543, Rwanda is considered a Low Human Development country by the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP, 2020) Human Development Report. The country's low levels of per capita income, Human Assets Index (HAI), and economic and environmental vulnerability index explain its categorisation as a Least Developed Country (LDC) by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2020). Nonetheless, Rwanda has become a role model due to its major advances in post-conflict recovery, human development, and gender equality, especially after one of the most violent episodes in Africa's recent history.

Rwanda has been the settlement of the Banyarwanda ethnic group since 500 BCE (Burnet, 2012). Since ancient times, the subgroups of this ethnicity: Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa, have shared a common language (Kinyarwanda) and a mostly rural livelihood (Schweisfurth, 2006). Nevertheless, rivalries between the majoritarian groups, Hutus and Tutsis, resulting from complex socio-economic differences and political interests, unfolded one of the most brutal genocides. Yet the same ethnic group, Hutu and Tutsi differentiated in ancient complex social categories of caste and economic class (Burnet, 2012). Such differences, which remained irrelevant for hundreds of years (Pottier, 2002), were exacerbated by the Rwandan monarchy who collaborated with the Belgian colonial rule. According to Pottier (2002), colonisers gave a racial connotation to Hutu and Tutsi identities based on features, due to the ongoing race-based anthropological analysis then popular in Europe. This system of categorisation served Belgians to polarise the Rwandan society and create a Tutsi nobility (Schweisfurth, 2006). Tutsis, therefore, became an economic and political elite. From 1960, in post-colonial Rwanda, the numerous governments politicised the differences between both groups and based on their origin and sympathies, persecuted Hutus and Tutsis (Burnet, 2012).

Ultimately, as the subsequent conflicts suggest, the differences between the two subgroups were interpreted by most Rwandans (and the international community) as purely 'racial' (Pottier, 2002). The tensions between Hutus and Tutsis escalated into a civil war; from 1990 to 1994, the Tutsi militia, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), and the government's Rwandan Armed Forces fought for the control of the Rwandan territory. In April 1994, the conflict reached its tipping point when RPF's forces assassinated the Rwandan president, Juvénal Habyarimana, and Burundian president Cyprien Ntaryamira (Burnet, 2012). The RPF invaded Kigali, and subsequently, the government gave the order to exterminate all Tutsis in the Rwandan territory. These actions unleashed three terrifying months of tortures and massacres. During the genocide, about one million Tutsis and 'moderate' Hutus (those who decided not to participate in the mass murder) were killed (Mwambari, 2017; Binagwaho et al., 2014), and nearly two million people were displaced (Burnet, 2012).

Post-genocide Rwanda was mired in destruction and poverty; the social fabric was completely fractured, so the country began a long process of reconciliation. About 20% of the population had died in the confrontations (Binagwaho et al., 2014), and "tens of thousands of Rwandans" (Longman, 2006, p. 150) participated in the genocide. Therefore, the traditional justice system based on dialogue, the *Gacaca*, was revived and the Gacaca courts served as a transitional and restorative justice method promoting truth about the conflict, and peace among Rwandans (Schweisfurth, 2006). Depending on the severity of the crimes, perpetrators received sentences of civil reparation, community service, or prison (Nkusi, 2014). To 2012, this method was successful in handling 1.9 million cases. In the international arena, the United Nations' Security Council created the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in November 1994 (United Nations, n.d.). To its end in 2015, this tribunal prosecuted 93 people singled out as responsible for major violations of the international humanitarian law (United Nations, n.d.). With such post-conflict efforts, Rwandans changed the way they perceived themselves. They no longer identify as Hutus or Tutsis, but simply as Rwandans; *ndi umunyarwanda* ("I am Rwandan") (Mannergren Selimovic, 2020).

Reconciliation prompted a rapid transformation: just over 25 years after the genocide, Rwanda went from a destroyed nation to a promising economy (Hasselskog, 2018). Post-conflict Rwanda has made major advancements in the Human Development Index (HDI), especially in terms of life expectancy, access to education, and healthcare (Hasselskog, 2018). The country's longevity "has doubled since mid-1990s" (Binagwaho et al., 2014, p. 371), 98% of children are enrolled in primary education (UNICEF, n.d.), and child mortality

has dropped from 276.4 (per 1000 live births) in 1994 to 34.3 in 2019 (World Bank, 2021b). As specified by UNCTAD (2020), out of all LDCs, only Myanmar and Rwanda have moved "from the low-capacity group into the average group" (p. VII); which shows improvements in productive capacity arising from "a combination of structural transformation and diversification" of the economy (p. 42). These indicators have followed a "highly centralised policymaking" (Hasselskog, 2018, p. 140) that is not without criticism. While the international community has applauded "the Rwandan miracle" (Nkusi, 2014), it has also condemned the restrictions to people's freedoms by the RPF government. President Paul Kagame's government, which started a third presidential term in 2018 after an amendment to the National Constitution, has been described as "highly authoritarian" (Hasselkog, 2018, p. 141), and denounced for its "intolerance for independent expression and political dissent" (Longman, 2006, p. 146). Yet, amid criticism and praise, Rwanda has undoubtedly become an example of resilience.

Another remarkable transformation that the country has experienced during post-conflict is the importance of gender equality as a political principle. After the implementation of the 2003 constitution, the government has supported numerous initiatives towards changing gender narratives that restricted women's opportunities (Kagaba, 2015). More specifically, the government has actively promoted a development agenda that recognises women's political participation and rights. In 2004, the government presented the National Gender Policy, a policy framework that includes gender-related plans and budgets, and distributes women-related responsibilities among the ministries (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). As indicated by President Paul Kagame in 2009, gender equality "is everybody's business" and is an essential component of Rwanda's "sustainable economic development" (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013, p. 1117). According to the Global Gender Gap Index ranking published by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2019), Rwanda is in the ninth position towards eliminating the gender gap[1]. The outstanding performance in this measurement is explained by Rwanda's female representation in parliament (56%); the largest worldwide (WEF, 2019). With this, women's inclusion became an essential part, or even the secret, of *the Rwandan miracle*.

Nevertheless, Rwandan women still face important challenges related to gender equality. Probably, the most visible is gender-based violence (GBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV). The Rwandan IPV rate is among the highest in the world (Thomson, Bah,

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[1] Measured by the difference between men's and women's access to *health and survival*, *educational attainment*, *economic participation and opportunity*, and *political representation* (WEF, 2019).

Rubanzana & Mutesa, 2015): a percentage of 37.1 of women report having experience this type of violence in their lifetime (UN Women, 2016); this number is higher than the African rate of 36.3% (La Mattina, 2017). In order to understand how in recent years Rwanda became a worldwide role model for gender equality (Kagaba, 2015) and the challenges that persist. The next section will explore how gender roles and public policies have evolved in Rwanda during recent history.

2.2. Gender roles in Rwanda

Despite its outstanding performance in gender equality, patriarchal norms remain visible in the Rwandan society. While advances in women's public participation are indisputable, gender relations in the private arena have not presented significant changes. Precisely, house- and care work are still a 'woman's role', which may constitute an obstacle for women's empowerment, and ultimately, to gender equality as a whole. The Rwandan case on unequal distribution of unpaid care work (UCW) is not isolated; indeed, the association of femininity and caregiving is almost universal (Folbre, 2012). Nonetheless, to understand its origin and implications for women in a given country, it is necessary to undertake a case-specific analysis. Gender roles of each context may be key for understanding how the system of unequal distribution of care-giving activities between men and women is sustained.

The following section will describe how gender roles have transformed throughout the Rwandan history and, consequently, impacted women's lives. Gender roles in Rwanda have been influenced by the local culture, the European colonial rule, the emergence of the women's movement, and the social changes that followed the 1994 genocide. The social structure that resulted from those events have not only transformed the country's economic and political situation, but also the way women's (and men's) role has been constructed in society. As I will explain, UCW has been a decisive factor throughout this transformation.

2.2.1.   From pre-colonial to independent Rwanda

In pre-colonial Rwanda, there was a strong differentiation between expectations from men and women. In Rwandan society, the social, political, and economic decisions (both in the private and public arenas) were mostly dominated by men (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013), with exceptional cases of women in the monarchical elite that had certain influence in politics (Watkins & Jessee, 2020). For Banyarwanda, an individual's role within society was primarily determined by their age; from the moment of birth until four years of age, Rwandans were not categorised based on gender and, thus, all children were treated

indistinctively (Burnet, 2012). Indeed, children used the same type of clothes and were identified by the community as *uruhinja* (babies) and *abana* (children). The categories of 'boys' and 'girls' were used when they were old enough to "take on household chores" (Burnet, 2012, p. 42). Likewise, they would become *abahungu* (sons) and had to help out watching over the livestock, and *abakobwa* (daughters) who had to fetch water, and sweep. As girls aged, their responsibilities within the community changed and increased: unmarried women (*abari*) cooked, cleaned, and assisted in the food crops. When married, both men's and women's roles became more clearly defined. Husbands (*abagabo*) had to grow cash crops, manage the livestock, and participate in paid labour (usually in circumstances of migration) (Burnet, 2012). Married women's activities were mostly related to cultivating food, and they became *umugore* (proper wives) when they gave birth to a male. Despite the male domination in decision-making, the complexity of the interactions between men and women gave Rwandans a sense of *kukuzanye* (complementarities) that was reflected in their contribution to the community (Burnet, 2012).

When the European colonial rule took control of the Rwandan territory, the gender roles changed. The German Empire incorporated Rwanda in 1899; subsequently, Belgians invaded in 1916 during World War I and aimed to install a new social organisation that resembled that of the European society (Carlson & Randell, 2013). Certainly, before the colonial rule, the Rwandan society was visibly differentiated based on gender, and women's role was expected to be submissive with respect to men (Kagaba, 2015; Longman, 2006). Yet, before European influence, women's archetypes highlighted the importance of women both in private and public life. According to the Rwandan proverb *umugore*, a woman, is *mutima w'urugo,* the "spiritual and moral centre of the house" (Burnet, 2012, p. 42; Uvuza, 2014), and the *umubabekasi* ('Queen Mother'), a woman whose advice was of important value for the King (Longman, 2006). Nonetheless, with colonialism, patriarchal norms were incorporated and aggravated (Carlson & Randell, 2013), the prototype of Victorian women, docile and domestic, was imported, and Rwandan women were deprived from their already limited power (Carlson & Randell, 2013). Moreover, the imposed banking and tax system altered the traditional division of labour within households (Burnet, 2012). These changes pushed men to work in agricultural projects, and left women out from the monetary economy and restricted their access to land (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013; Burnet, 2012;). Colonisation debilitated *kukuzanye* and expanded women's subordination in other arenas.

Rwanda became independent in 1962, but subordination of women did not change. Women's empowerment and participation in politics were not relevant for Rwandan post-

colonial rulers (Longman, 2006). In fact, Rwandan laws stipulated that women were under their male relatives' custody (husbands, fathers, and brothers) (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). Likewise, women could not inherit or own land, and their participation in economic and political decisions was restricted. Further, Rwandan women remained illiterate in the post-independence years; the only women-oriented programme was an initiative that trained hundreds of young women as midwives (Burnet, 2012). This was an action that nurtured the narrative of women as domestic and responsible for all care-giving activities. After the 1973 coup d'état in which Juvénal Habyarimana became president of Rwanda, there was no advance for women's economic, social, or political empowerment (Longman, 2006). During his government, women remained under the command of men, and they shouldered the "the bulk of the domestic work and work on the land" (Sibomana, 1999, p. 31 as cited in Longman, 2006). Nonetheless, moved by the exclusion from governmental support, and the increasing economic crisis, women's involvement in the civil society began to take form.

2.2.2. Gendered crisis, gendered violence

During the 1980s and 90s, women's participation in social and political endeavours arose in a context of fragile governance. Rwandan civil society was debilitated after the establishment of the single party-state, the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (MRND), which aimed to control all Rwandan civil society organisations (Longman, 2006). Other organisations, due to their 'a-political' approach managed to operate outside the single party control, including some women's organisations, such as Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe, an umbrella organisation working for the advancement of women, peace, and development (Mwambari, 2017). These organisations started addressing the economic necessities of the Rwandan society through an essentialising discourse of women as mothers and wives (*mutima w'urugo*). During these years, the economic and social situation of the country weakened due to structural adjustment programmes, overpopulation, low coffee prices, and corruption (Kelly, 2019; Longman, 2006). Hence, women's civil society movement worked to provide the civil society with basic needs that the government was unable to guarantee (Kelly, 2019). Thus, women's organisations gained ground and influence in the Rwandan society, and the names of female leaders started appearing in political civil society organisations advocating for human rights (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). The impact was also visible in the government when in 1992, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, was designated minister of education, and became the first female prime minister in Africa in

1993. Despite the gender roles that relegated women to domestic life, the women's movement gave them participation in the public sphere.

Nonetheless, parallel to women's participation in civil society, violence against women was exacerbated during the Rwandan civil war. Between 1990 and 1994, the Rwandan Armed Forces fought the RPF, and such confrontations devastated civil society, but especially women: the militaries targeted women and sexual violence intensified. While some calculations indicate that between 250,000 and 500,000 were raped during this time (Watkins & Jessee, 2020), others affirm that at least 500,000 women, regardless of their 'ethnicity', were victims of sexual violence (Williams & Bower, 2009). Indeed, the situation escalated to a point that dress codes changed for women. As a cultural norm, women in Rwanda, except for educated women, did not wear undergarments, but due to the growth in rapes, the government urged women to start wearing *umugondo* (undergarments) (Burnet, 2012). The use of *umugondo* as 'protection' from sexual assaults was normalised and due to the long-term consequences of sexual violence, it is still used in the rural areas (Burnet, 2012). However, the gendered consequences of the armed conflict did not only influence the social expectations of women.

The Rwandan conflict conveniently used and modified masculine gender roles. In 1992, the government declared in the Family Code that men were meant to be the heads of households (Carlson & Randell, 2013; Scharlach, 1999). This regulation exacerbated the cultural norms that established men as decision-makers—and women as caregivers. Accordingly, during the Rwandan civil war, the masculine role of *umugabo* (husband) was actively promoted by both military fronts. *Abagabo* (husbands) who were supposed to embody patriotism, dignity, and strength (Williamson, 2016) were pushed to demonstrate their masculinity by fighting for their 'ethnicity'. Also, the economic crisis that the country experienced during the 1980s and 1990s increased poverty levels and unemployment among young men. The debilitated youth that was by law obliged to provide for their families, became prone to recruitment by the military forces that were later responsible for the wave of violence during the genocide. To Williamson (2016), "the genocide was as much a crisis of masculinity as it was one of ethnicity" (p.42) [2].

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[2] The participation of women as perpetrators during the Rwandan genocide is not as documented in academic literature, despite the evidence of cases of women's active involvement in human rights violations (Adler, Loyle & Globerman, 2007). On this regard, Sharlach (1999) affirms: "In 1994 Rwanda, a woman's loyalty to her ethnic group almost always overrode any sense of sisterhood to women of the other major ethnic group. T The case of the Rwandan genocide underscores the need for practitioners of women's studies not to overlook ethnic politics when examining violence against women." (p. 388).

2.2.3. A gendered genocide

The genocide devastated the lives of Rwandans and modified their gender relations. In accordance with the masculine discourse (*abagabo*) of the armed groups, the national records show that about 54% of the deaths during the genocide were men (Mwambari, 2017). Subsequently, Rwanda ended up with an estimated 70% of its population composed of women, and in some areas, the proportion was 80% or more (Mwambari, 2017; Burnet, 2012). In spite of the extermination of the majority of the male population, gender analyses of the events point out that the violence that women (those killed and the survivors) experienced was distinctive. This violence was not only conflict-based, but also (or even *mostly*) gender-based. On the one hand, the sexual violence of the civil war escalated as the late propagandist hate speech targeted women—contrary to previous confrontations that safeguarded women, children and elderly. Precisely, the Hutu militias promoted an imaginary of Tutsi women as "seductresses" of Hutu men, persecuted Hutu men who were married to Tutsi (Longman, 2006, p. 137), and attacked Tutsi women "to prevent them from giving birth to more Tutsis" (Mwambari, 2017, p. 73). On the other hand, the increased violence against women is also interpreted as a retaliation to the advances that women achieved with the emergence of the 1980-90s' women's movement (Taylor, 1999). Hence, violence against women was inarguably a major characteristic of the genocide (Longman, 2006).

After the genocide, the Rwandan society experienced a series of transformations in gender roles. The disrupted gender ratio derived from the genocide changed the traditional sexual division of labour that had existed for centuries. Due to the lack of male labour force, the number of women-headed households greatly increased as their husbands were dead, exiled, imprisoned, or recruited for military service (Burnet, 2012). The Rwandan society had to trust women for the task of rebuilding the country, the need to rebuild the nation imposed demands on women in non-traditional spheres, and the traditional gender roles were transformed (Mwambari, 2017). Notably, the adjustments in gender roles were not smooth; in the process, women (especially widows) suffered from poverty, social exclusion, and rejection (Burnet, 2012). However, women assumed traditionally masculine responsibilities such as construction, political leadership, and livestock management (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013; Slegh, Barker, Kimonyo, Ndolimana & Bannerman, 2013). As women's role within the family changed (Schindler, 2010), the restrictions on women's freedom to undertake commercial transactions and simple legal procedures that survived the colonial rule became obsolete (Longman, 2006). In 1999, the inheritance law gave equal ownership rights to land

both to men and women (Ansoms & Holvoet, 2008). Furthermore, the involvement of women in the transitional justice process for the genocide perpetrators, *Gacaca courts*, also contributed to legitimising female participation and voice in public spaces (Mwambari, 2017).

2.2.4. Gender equality: a way to rebuilding a country

As the Rwandan social fabric had been destroyed by the genocide (Burnet, 2012), the country was in need to re-build the civil society. To this end, the women's movement that had arisen in the 1980s became crucial; civil society organizations multiplied and became important allies for the state in the reconstruction process of the country (Mwambari, 2017; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013; Longman, 2006). Women used the already-established civil society organizations and established more to assist in the post-genocide era. Indeed, the number of women's organisations grew from 493 to 15,400 between 1986 and the mid-1990s (Mwambari, 2017). As it had happened during the economic crisis, the women's movement organised socio-economic initiatives and provided basic-need services such as food and shelter for the hundreds of thousands of orphans and widows (Mwambari, 2017; Newbury & Baldwin, 2000). Withal, these organisations focused on peacebuilding and cooperated with international donors and NGOs such as the United States Agency for International Aid (USAID) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Mwambari, 2017). Yet, the efforts of women's organisations were insufficient for the complete reconstruction of the nation.

Post-conflict Rwanda required a new institutional framework that expanded women's participation in favour of their involvement in further scenarios, and since its establishment, the incoming government supported such a cause. Before the civil war, RPF's leaders had been exiled in Uganda, where programmes for women's rights and inclusion were being implemented; and thus, they established similar policies (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). The government created in 1997 the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Affairs (MIGEFASO) and appointed women in governmental positions including the secretary of state, parliamentarians, and ministers (Newbury & Baldwin, 2000). In 1997, the Ministry of Gender and Women Promotion (MIGEPROFE) was installed "to focus on gender equality and women's empowerment with a special focus on mainstreaming gender in different institutions" (MIGEPROF, n.d., para. 7). RPF's interest in gender equality also materialised in the 2003 Rwandan National Constitution that stipulated a 30% reservation for women in parliament and other governmental positions (Kagaba, 2015; Longman, 2006), and in the

creation of a Gender Monitoring Office, a national organisation for the promotion of gender equality and the elimination of gender-based violence (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). Also, RPF's leadership adhered to international conventions and treaties on women's rights such as the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Abbott & Malunda, 2016). In fact, due to the successful inclusion of women in governmental positions in Rwanda, "women's participation becomes the norm rather than the exception" (Longman, 2006, p. 143). Albeit the catastrophic events of the genocide, the subsequent changes in women's role created a pro-gender equality environment in Rwandan.

The possibilities given by the actions of the women's movement, and the government's commitment with female participation drastically changed and expanded the range of activities that women were supposed to perform (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). While it is true that women conquered new places for themselves, the participation of women in post-conflict recovery did not transform the essence of femininity expectations in the Rwandan society. First, as explained by Kantengwa (2018) the state rhetoric "calls on women to be 'mutima w'urugo', and to embrace their feminine traits and to become the cornerstones for nation building." (p. 20). Second, women's civil society movement was closely connected to the narrative of women as mothers and wives. Finally, within families, even after the 'masculine' responsibilities women undertook after the genocide; there was still "little flexibility to negotiate responsibilities within the household" (Schindler, 2010, p.1). Therefore, women's role as purely domestic *mutima w'rugo* was not challenged; rather, such a responsibility was transferred, scaled-up to the public arena: from caretakers of homes to caretakers of the country.

Consequently, despite the disruptive positions that women were occupying, the construction of femininity was still highly related to their roles as caregivers. The next section will delve into critical perspectives on the Rwandan gender equality model and its connection with the issue of care.

2.3. Unpaid Care Work in Rwanda

2.3.1. An invisible issue

Today, different gender equality indexes highlight the results that Rwanda has achieved regarding women's empowerment. The reduction of maternal mortality (Debusscher & Ansoms 2013), and the increase of women in the labour market (WEF, 2019) are on the list, yet women's political empowerment is the most quoted. Female representation in both

parliament and ministries is above 50% (WEF, 2019). Nonetheless, the presence of women in governmental positions as the almost exclusive focus of the gender equality model has raised discontent among the civil society and academia. The Rwandan gender equality approach and its reliance on women's political participation (mostly in parliament) has been subject to criticism. To international media, scholars, and women's organizations (and activists), women's political participation should not be the sole component in the pursuit of women's empowerment—especially in the context of an authoritarian state (Longman, 2006). A high number of female seats in the congress have not prevented laws such as the reduction of maternal leave (from twelve to six weeks) from being adopted (Debusscher & Ansoms 2013). Debusscher and Ansoms (2013) explain that those contradictions demonstrate structural challenges that may hinder the transformative potential and sustainability of gender policies in Rwanda.

One of the problems within the Rwandan gender equality agenda is the economic connotation that the government has given to women's empowerment (Debusscher & Ansoms 2013). Governmental documents have equated *gender equality* with female participation in the labour force; according to officials' statements, women represent "more than half of Rwanda's capital investment" (Debusscher & Ansoms 2013, p. 1119; Uwineza, & Pearson, 2009). This reasoning suggests an instrumental interpretation of women's empowerment: a tool towards economic development and not as an end in itself. Regardless of this agenda, the fact is that women's economic participation and autonomy is one of the biggest challenges in terms of gender equality in Rwanda. Women's income and technical skills are still lower when compared to those of men, despite the advancements in girls' education (WEF, 2019). This economic interpretation of women's rights leaves the transformation of gender inequalities outside the prioritised political concerns (Debusscher & Ansoms 2013). Moreover, the efforts towards bringing women into the labour market may also ignore that women are already working, only without remuneration.

As in every country around the world, UCW in Rwanda is unequally distributed based on gender roles. According to the figures presented by the NGO ActionAid Rwanda (2020), women undertake most of the care work: housework, and caring activities for the family, and the community. ActionAid Rwanda's study analysed 583 households and categorised its findings according to their location: rural, suburban, and urban (ActionAid Rwanda, 2020). In every context, women's unpaid workload is more than double that of men; while women in rural areas report six hours of UCW per day, men only report two. For the case of suburban areas, women work five, and men one, and in urban areas, women have two hours of

domestic work, while men report none. The differences in time between regions may be explained by the availability of infrastructure (water and energy facilities), and of domestic workers (paid care work) in the urban areas. More importantly, the consequences of the disproportioned UCW affect women's empowerment and development.

2.3.2. Women's care work and development

When studying the Rwandan case, several authors have reported how the extra (unpaid) working hours reduce women's socio-economic empowerment (Rohwerder et al., 2017; Doyle et al., 2014; Schindler, 2010). Due to the long hours of care work, women tend to concentrate in the lower income employment, usually informal, and thus their ability to bargain in the banking system is lower. Hence, UCW may prevent women from accessing better jobs and financial products (Domínguez-Serrano, 2012). In the Rwandan context, Chopra and Zambelli (2017) reported how limited time that women have as a consequence of UCW: "women felt they were overworked and unable to rest – they felt unable to get all their work done in time, and felt very stressed and tired because of this" (p. 34). ActionAid Rwanda (2020) found that the domestic responsibilities restrict women's possibilities to accumulate assets and savings. What is more, the obstacles to formal employment also affect their chances of participating in collective action and decision-making (ActionAid Rwanda, 2020). The gender role that puts women in charge of housework and care also restricts their political participation, access to education, and time for leisure. Nonetheless, the care burden is not only persistent inside their households.

The Rwandan development model is heavily dependent on the work that women do for their communities: the "invisible labour" (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013, p.1119). Since the 1980s, during the Rwandan economic crisis, women's organisations have been key in the provision of basic needs for civil society in general. After the genocide, the reliance on the women's movement increased as a response to the post-conflict challenges of the country. To date, the government trusts the civil society organisations with most of the community care work needed and the provision of basic services (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). In spite of the important contributions to Rwandans' development, the dependency on NGOs' actions to fulfil state responsibilities exposes great challenges for governance, and women's rights. On the one hand, an important proportion of care jobs in the NGOs is performed by volunteers who are mostly women without economic remuneration (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013; Domínguez-Serrano, 2012). Debusscher & Ansoms' (2013) highlight how this development model disregards the gendered nature of care: "The neglect of these 'invisible' labour

occupations in which women are overrepresented is surprising given their contribution to local livelihoods and the overall well-being of the population" (p. 1123).

On the other hand, the strong influence that the Rwandan government has over the civil society organisations compromise their autonomy. Longman (2006) affirms that the political leaders frequently regulate NGOs' endeavours: "independent civil society organizations have been systematically bullied by the RPF, being forced either to conform to RPF directives or face dissolution" (p. 146). Besides, Debusscher and Ansoms (2013) explain that such control can also be done through restrictions over public resources: "civil society organizations must be on good terms with the ministry and work on topics related to government goals in order to receive funding" (p. 1127). In a context of restrictions to democratic values and political opposition, NGOs experience inability to establish a truly independent agenda, and therefore their research and advocacy towards civil rights actions (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). This lack of self-determination may reduce NGOs' room for manoeuvre to implement projects that do not align with the government's agenda; in the case of gender interventions, the approach that favour economic development may restrict actions that prioritise women's empowerment.

Despite the importance of UCW in Rwanda, Debusscher and Ansoms (2013) explain that the government fails to acknowledge the gendered nature of care-giving activities in the Rwandan economy. For the case of agriculture, the modernisation programmes that the government has promoted entail high risk for small farmers and food crops; activities that have for centuries been performed by women (*abari* and *umugore*). These risks represent a problem for women's economic empowerment and destabilise the relations within households (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). The authors are critical of the lack of recognition of the value of women's care work; as it is not considered in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and therefore caring is not perceived as actual work (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). These efforts would also contribute to paid domestic workers (mostly women and girls) who, due to lack of regulation, cannot access a minimum wage and better labour conditions. Hence, the conditions in which women undertake care work for their families and community do not only represent a problem for them as individuals, but also for the Rwandan gender equality model (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013).

Gender roles have contributed to perpetuate an imaginary of women as caregivers of their families and community. In times of crisis, such a role has been beneficial for women's participation in non-governmental and governmental organizations. Likewise, Rwanda has consolidated gender equality an important principle for development in Rwanda. However, in

the process, care work has remained the women's role par excellence, both in private and public spheres. The association of femininity and care has also put women's human development at risk, which raises contradictions with respect to the principle of gender equality. In a context that still essentialises, increases, and makes unpaid work invisible, it is necessary to analyse how to promote gender roles and policies that are not merely a mechanism for the country's economic growth, but the key towards supporting women's empowerment and gender equality.

2.3.3.   Joining the conversation: objectives of this study

Different aspects about UCW in Rwanda have been studied in recent years. Juliana Kantengwa (2018), in her master thesis for the University of Rwanda, explored the perspectives of female politicians towards care work. Kantengwa (2018) explains: "women reported to do unpaid care work not out of desperation since they all had hired house help but out of free choice for self-fulfilment, to obtain desired quality, to match individual taste and for own pleasure and/ or that of their loved ones" (p. v). Her findings are illustrative of a particular population in Kigali; yet they do not represent the majority of women in the country, who live in rural areas, are uneducated, and do not have a formal paid job. Doyle et al. (2014) examined the impact of engaging men in domestic work activities in order to transform gender roles. The results show the importance of including men in gender interventions and the outcomes that men in UCW represent for gender-based violence reduction. Rohwerder et al. (2017) analysed the status of women's UCW in Rwandan rural areas and explored its impact in women's economic empowerment, according to their findings: *"Many of the women who are struggling to achieve a positive balance between paid work and care work, work long hours, far from home, and have no childcare support from work"* (p. 3). These studies have brought relevant considerations to the meaning of UCW for urban women, the importance of care work in promoting alternative and less violent gender roles, and the impact of UCW in women's development.

This study aims to analyse the perceptions and specific measures that NGOs addressing UCW are implementing in rural areas in Rwanda. The reasons for studying these organisations include some of their previously explained particularities: civil society organisations have been crucial in Rwanda's development, their close relationship with the governmental may determine the type of projects they implement, and their leadership has been key in advocating for gender equality. The research questions that guide this study are:

Main research question: What are the approaches of selected NGOs' towards addressing the issue of unpaid care work among women in rural Rwanda, and how conducive are they to the promotion of women's empowerment?

Sub-research questions:

- What are the perceptions of NGOs regarding the situation of women's unpaid care work in Rwanda?
- What are the actions that NGOs are implementing to recognise, reduce, and redistribute women's unpaid care work in Rwanda?
- How do NGOs' perceptions and actions upon UCW align with the Rwandan government's position on women's unpaid care work?
- How do NGOs' perceptions and actions upon UCW align with theories on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment?

The next chapter will explain the historical evolution of the theoretical perspective on unpaid care work; why the care labour is considered *work*; how it relates to the ideas on gender and development, and why it is connected to the debates upon women's empowerment.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will describe the most relevant theories concerning unpaid care work and women's empowerment. First, I will explain how care became part of the gender and development discussion: *Why do we 'care'?* Second, I will describe chosen theories on women's empowerment that will later be useful in the analysis of gender and development (NGOs') interventions.

3.1. Why do we *care*?

The international recognition of unpaid care work in the development discussion is the result of academic and political debates that have been taking place over the last fifty years. The issue on women's unpaid care work started receiving attention during early 1960s and 70s from different currents of feminisms and development studies. Several theories addressed both women's role in the household, and within the political and economic system. The whole debate brought public attention to an invisible economic force that had been overlooked by theorists and statistics: women's unpaid care work (UCW). From then on, discussions revolved around the recognition of the reproductive labour, and the social justice demands derived from its unequal distribution throughout history.

3.1.1. Unpaid care work: women as part of the economic system

The economic analysis of the women's domestic responsibilities was a controversial postulate that did not receive support in the academic environment. In 1934, Margaret G. Reid published *Economics of Household Production*, an analysis where she developed an unprecedented method that assigned economic value to the activities that women carried out as housekeepers (Benería, 1999). The author proposed an understanding that equated household subsistence activities to actual *labour*, and women to *producers* (Allen, 1934). The proposal resonated with economic theorists that criticized neoclassical economists for their omission of household activities, which though were not determined by the law of price, were essential for human life (Kyrk, 1935). However, most authors criticised Reid's "meticulous price calculations" (Hanson, 1937, p. 762) of housework because they considered it inappropriate from an economic perspective: at home, the lines between consumption and production were blurred, and women's activities such as childcare could be considered both work, and recreation. To mainstream economists, the household production theory portrayed an economistic view that obliterated family life's real purpose. Hence, Reid's contributions to

women's unpaid care remained "essentially untouched" (Benería, 1999, p. 289) for almost 40 years.

The idea of measuring women's contribution to society became increasingly important for development projects during 1970s. By then, female involvement in economic development was limited to the role of beneficiaries; in fact, development projects addressed women's concerns (often reduced to fertility) as 'problems to be solved': a current known as the welfare approach. Nevertheless, in 1970, Ester Boserup (2007), a Danish economist who considered that "women's work in labour force" (Benería, 1999, p. 287) was underestimated by macroeconomic statistics, proposed an innovative approach: *Women's Role in Economic Development*. The publication confronted the traditional welfare approach in development and was the basis for the Women in Development (WID) framework. This framework depicted "women as productive members of society" (Razavi, 2007, p. 4), by highlighting their contribution to agriculture and domestic work, especially in developing countries. Boserup therefore helped making women's work visible and provided evidence of the potential contribution to the economy.

Nonetheless, Boserup's (2007) reasoning was less a vindication of women's work, and more a data-based evidence of the opportunity cost of excluding women from productive work. For her, the "primary motive" (Boserup, 2007, p. 211) to support women's participation in labour was the expected increase in production, especially in the rural areas, for which it was necessary to "reduce the productivity gap between male and female labour" (p. 213). This approach was well received by the liberal economic agenda of the United Nations, which in 1975 at the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City, brought attention to the inconvenience that excluding women from the "economically active population" (United Nations, 1976, p. 32) represented for national statistics. However, Boserup's liberal feminist approach did not question the set-up of the economic system, nor valued women's present contribution to the economy, for Benería and Sen (1981): "By concentrating on the sphere of production outside the household and ignoring the role of women in reproduction, her work fails to locate the basis of this subordination" (p. 282). Hence, it did not echo the increasingly active voice of radical feminism.

Radical feminists demanded a new approach to understanding economics; one that included women's existent contribution to the economy as well as a recognition of its subordinating nature. Feminist economics emerged therefore as a discontent with the (male-dominated) neoclassical economic model (Razavi, 2007). Firstly, they criticised mainstream economics' principles: the model of individual behaviour, and the exclusive focus on the

monetary economy (Connelly & Kongar, 2017). The assumption of humans as economic agents moved solely by 'rational choice' and self-interest (*homo economicus*) was considered both delusive and impractical. Secondly, feminist economists pointed-out the lack of awareness of the non-monetary activities that were essential to the economic system: "'productive work' depends on the operation of some nonmonetary set of social relations" (Elson, 1994, p. 40 as cited in Folbre, 2006). The "social reproduction" labour, the subsistence and caring activities performed mostly by women and without economic remuneration (contrary to the *homo economicus*), were out of the neoclassical equation; despite their contribution to the (monetised) production (Razavi, 2007). Hence, a fundamental part of the economy was undervalued, but more importantly, a work that was mostly done by women was not being recognised. Likewise, feminists both from the academic and the political sphere aimed to make women's unpaid work visible.

Some contributions to make UCW visible came from the debates within feminism and Marxism. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, an academic and political discussion known as the Domestic Labour Debate (DLD) emerged, and it became widespread in the United Kingdom and the United States (Rao, 2018). DLD dealt with two key concerns: (first) denouncing how women's oppression was not a priority in the class struggle (within Marxism), and (second) explaining the relation between women's unpaid domestic work and capitalism (Molyneux, 1979). The first concern dealt with the benefits that men perceived from women's unpaid domestic labour, which made them the true oppressors, or what Christine Delphy (1980) described as *The Main Enemy*, of their class. Therefore, feminist economists sustained that marriage perpetuated an exploitative 'mode of production' that united women regardless of their class, and consequently, should motivate them to play an active role "within socialist struggle" (Molyneux, 1979, p. 4). However, for the issue of UCW, it meant that for the first time UCW was not "women's emotional, caring labour" (Conelly & Kongar, 2017, p. 261), but the actual root of women's societal subordination (Rousseau, 2016).

The second concern DLD proponents had was how the exploitative mode of production that took place inside the households fuelled capitalism. Marxist feminists called domestic work 'the other economy', a parallel and invisible economic *system* in which women provided their unwaged labour to the reproduction of labour force (Rao, 2018; Benston, 1969). Household was considered the "other factory": where, through subsistence production and unpaid care (Razavi, 2007) the workers of the capitalist system were (re)produced (Rousseau, 2016). In that sense, the main political cause of feminist intellectuals

such as Silvia Federici (1975), Dalla Costa, and Selma James became the recognition of care work as a productive labour; a work to be remunerated (Rousseau, 2016). Those intellectuals founded the *Wages for Housework Campaign*, a social movement that gained popular support in Europe and North America, and whose most important demands included: the abolition of the household as the basis of society, and female access to paid work. To Marxist feminists, these conditions would enable women's emancipation (Rousseau, 2016) as paid jobs would give women economic autonomy, and bargaining power at home.

3.1.2.   Women's subordination: beyond economics

Feminist economists developed an analytical framework that related capitalism and patriarchy, where unpaid domestic work at the service of men was the root of women's subordination. Nevertheless, the contributions of the Marxist feminist for the recognition of unpaid work as structural for women's oppression, were not without criticism. First, the exclusive economic focus of the Marxist feminist analysis of women's oppression was criticised. For Maxine Molyneux (1979), the results of DLD contributed to addressing important issues on women's UCW and its connection with the economic system. Nonetheless, the author sustained that the materialist understanding had a *"tendency to economic reductionism"* (Molyneux, 1979, p. 4), as it ignored additional complex factors that had also an impact on women's subordination. Molyneux (1979) and Pearson, Whitehead and Young (1981) conveyed that other forces such as the value of men's and women's labour (and the consequential inequalities in the workplace), the governmental incidence in women's subordination, and other ideological and psychological, reasons within marriage were overlooked by feminist economists. This line of thought would result in the emergence of gender studies concerned with the power relations beyond their significance for capital. For the discussion of unpaid work, the economic reductionism critique would mean a move from a focus on unpaid care *work* (economic considerations), to an emphasis on unpaid *care* work (Razavi, 2007).

Accordingly, Molyneux (1979) criticised DLD due to its overemphasis on marriage as the centre of women's subordination and on the male breadwinner household model, which was progressively changing. The results of the 1960s- and 70s-Women's Liberation Movement resulted in changes in the sexual division of labour: women were increasingly accessing paid jobs, and the technological advances increased the efficiency of housework activities such as cleaning and cooking, especially in developed countries (Folbre, 1994). However, men did not engage as actively in unpaid work, and women's access to

employment resulted in an increased burden in women's work known as the *double day* (Folbre, 1994) or *double burden* (the combination of paid and unpaid care work) (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Moreover, the social undervaluation of care labour, along with women's specialisation in the *pink-collar* positions (paid care jobs) (Esquivel, 2014), and the discrimination of women at the workplace (Folbre, 2006) prevented women from completely accessing the promised benefits of paid labour: economic autonomy and social security. This phenomenon demonstrated that the radical feminist beliefs on the ability of income to provide women with bargaining power at home and in the public sphere were not realistic. Accordingly, Molyneux (1979) sustained that the day-to-day (male) labour production was not the main contribution of women to the economic system. For her, the most valuable activity of unpaid work was the reproduction of *future* labour force, more specifically, childcare; an unpaid work that was still subject to the traditional sexual division of labour that dictated the relations between women and men in the private sphere (Molyneux, 1979).

Thus, within development studies, feminists started analysing gendered realities that were not considered by the WID approach. This new strand known as Gender and Development (GAD) aimed to bring an analysis on the power relations that the gender norms dictated; including women in the system was not enough, the gendered dimensions of the economic, and political realities needed to be addressed. Case in point, the unbalanced distribution of UCW made evident that economic policies were also gendered. During the 1980s and 1990s, the economic policies that followed the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and the phenomenon of globalisation dramatically reduced the governmental expenditure in social programmes (Elson, 1992). Feminist economists denounced the implications of such macroeconomic policy for women: the shortages in social security, healthcare, education, and childcare inevitably increased women's UCW. Diane Elson (2002), a British economist, theorised on the public sector's bias of assuming "unlimited supplies of female labour" (p. 2), and on how women were becoming shock absorbers. Feminist scholars called attention on how the neoliberal policies diminished public investment and how privatisation transferred the responsibilities of child- and elderly care to families, where mostly women assumed the burden (Moreno Mínguez, 2012).

Nonetheless, the care burden was not only *domestic* (as most Marxist feminists had affirmed); women's unremunerated responsibilities frequently extended beyond their families to their community. Caroline Moser (1989) developed a conceptual framework that aimed to describe with greater accuracy the care burden women shouldered. The idea of the double-burden or second-shift tended to ignore the role of community managers women performed

within the realities of the *Third World*, and in contexts where SAPs had transmitted caring services back to people (households and neighbourhoods). The author coined the term *triple burden* referring to the three roles that women played: productive, reproductive, and communal labour. This framework was also a critique to WID programmes that were encouraging female involvement in development initiatives as means to reduce poverty or to promote economic development; whilst women's needs remained neglected. That line of though would be used for Moser (1989) to promote a women and development approach, namely the *empowerment approach*. This approach would acknowledge the triple role, and the gendered and oppressing power relations women in the developing world faced. The *empowerment approach* will be later explained along with further considerations on the idea of power in the area of Gender and Development.

3.1.3.   Caring about women

The feminist political movements of 1960s, and 1970s, as well as the gendered social injustices denounced by the GAD approach contributed to putting in the Gender Mainstream the need to acknowledge the contribution of UCW, and its unequal distribution. In 1995, the Fourth International Women's Conference held in Beijing became the first international institution to formally recognize unremunerated care and reproductive work (Rao, 2018). The global recognition of unpaid care brought attention to the importance of recognising and quantifying women's UCW in national and development statistics.

In order to measure the amount of time women were investing in care; governments, NGOs, and development agencies implemented time diaries or surveys. There, the participants registered the amount of time designated to a particular housework or caring task. Time-use surveys were conducted in developed countries since 1960s but popularized in developing countries after the Beijing Conference (Rao, 2018; Folbre, 2013). From 1966 to 2015, more than 85 countries worldwide undertook time-surveys as part of their national statistics and development plans (Elson, 2017). On the one hand, these figures informed governments on the estimated monetary value of women's unremunerated labour and its value based on macroeconomic indicators such as GDP. On the other hand, they facilitated the theoretical discussion beyond women's economic contributions, and more to the consequences of UCW in women's human development: measuring the inputs of care, rather than only its outputs (Folbre, 2006).

To explain the considerations and consequences women faced due to unpaid domestic work, Nancy Folbre (1994), revised previous theories. As a feminist economist, Folbre

(1995) sustained that yet essential for the economy, women's unpaid care was not consistent with the *homo economicus* rationality. Though, Folbre's (1995) interpretation of the reasons for women's dedication to care work distanced itself from Marxist feminists' views: reducing care labour to a transactional exchange or merely as exploitation disregarded women's "intrinsic motivations". The American economist sustained care work was motivated by a "personal and emotional engagement" (Folbre, 2006, p. 187), which explained women's willingness to provide an unremunerated and undervalued service. This 'emotional engagement' Folbre talked about did not support neoclassical perspectives portraying women's care work as "natural" and extra-economic, and therefore, unquestionable feminine responsibility. The author argued that the willingness to provide UCW came from a social construction that linked femininity with caregiving (Folbre, 2012). This traditional association created an undervalued supply of *"intrinsically motivated"* caring workers, that despite of the possible rewards—"stronger family ties or higher-quality services" (Rao, 2018, p. 7)—faced also substantial costs. Folbre's (2013) concerns arose from the additional responsibilities of paid employment that the society was now demanding from women, while the caregiving role remained unchanged (the 'second-shift'). Taking care of dependents, mainly children and elderly, meant financial and temporal constraints that compromised women's wellbeing and human capabilities (Folbre, 2013).

The drawbacks of the almost exclusively feminine care labour were also explored in the Human Capabilities Approach. Martha Nussbaum's (2000) proposed a theoretical framework and a development model that aim to guarantee *human capabilities*: "what people are actually able to do and be" (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 239). In her analysis, she described the inevitable *"neediness"* (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 236) of the human condition, and therefore, stressed that providing care was an essential activity for ensuring the fulfilment of human capabilities. On this regard, Nussbaum highlighted that albeit its importance, care work cannot be provided at the expense of the caregiver's exploitation. She recognised the gendered nature of the caring labour: women carried out the unpaid care work without remuneration and acknowledgement and called attention on the need to act upon the social injustice sustaining the development of human capabilities: "A good society must arrange to provide care… without exploiting women as they have traditionally been exploited" (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 236). Nussbaum (2000) emphasized the paradox that women's role as supporters of others' development entailed reduced capabilities for women in terms of: income, political participation, leisure time, and self-expression.

The incidence of the caring labour on women's human development also promoted former discussions on poverty, the development indicator par excellence. During 1990s, the phenomenon of the *feminisation of poverty* popularized after pointed-out by international development organizations (Chant, 2006). In 1995, the United Nations Conference on Women published the (later invalidated) statistics that 70% of the world's population living in poverty conditions were women, and the Beijing Declaration had warned that "the number of women living in poverty […had] increased disproportionately to the number of men, particularly in the developing countries" (United Nations, 1995, p. 19). These figures rapidly disseminated in the development lexicon and boosted gendered interventions, despite the lack of data to support them. International organisations understood feminisation of poverty mainly as the material deprivations, mostly income, perceived by women (Chant, 2006). While that observation could be true in specific geographic contexts; it neglected other dimensions of poverty that were highly gendered. Feminist economists praised the arising global awareness on the deprived conditions of women in developing countries, though they adverted that the feminisation of poverty debate had to be more nuanced (Chant, 2008).

3.1.4. De-feminising care

An exclusive focus on income could divert the efforts that GAD was making in exposing the gendered power relations inside development theory. Feminist authors criticized the 70% figure the United Nations had made popular, as it lacked empirical gender-specific evidence to make it conclusive (Chant, 2006). Nonetheless, deeper gender analyses revealed that poverty affected women differently, and demonstrated the role of unpaid care work played in that reality. A gendered revision of the concept of *time poverty* (popular in the 1970s) illustrated the consequences of the disproportionate unpaid care workload had over women (Conelly & Kongar, 2017). Feminists pointed-out that in addition to the double-day of taxing-employment and housework (Nussbaum, 2001), women had the dual burden of 'income poverty' and 'time poverty' (Conelly & Kongar, 2017) resulting in reduced leisure, education, and citizenship.

Another GAD critique to the development interventions dealing with women's poverty was related to the origin of such conditions. Sylvia Chant (2008), an English economist, argued that the income-based feminisation of poverty discourse overlooked fundamental considerations on the gendered aspects of poverty. Chant (2008) described that anti-poverty programmes had failed to challenge the intra-household power relations that perpetuated women's poverty. The author highlighted the naturalized responsibility of

women in fighting poverty at a household level: often forced to reduce their 'productive' employment and (thus) their income to take care of dependents (Chant, 2008). Women and girls were commonly compelled to satisfy cultural expectations of femininity—"'good wives' and 'dutiful daughters'" (Chant, 2006, p. 208)—that were tied to the caring labour; a social construction of altruism that was not shared by male counterparts, especially in developing countries. Thus, unpaid care work became an essential concept for the understanding of women's human development (Chant, 2006; 2008) exhibited behind the feminisation of poverty was truly a *feminisation of obligation*.

The feminisation of obligation was consistent with Folbre's (2012) ideas on the socially constructed relation between femininity and care. Folbre (2012; 2006) explained how the gender system determined individuals' motivation to take care of others. Indeed, she sustained that albeit transformed by women's increased participation in paid work, the traditional male breadwinner model still prompted households to a common trend: "men tend to devote more money, and women more direct care time" (Folbre, 2006, p. 195). Even though care work provided crucial inputs for human capabilities development, the male breadwinner social structure created disadvantages for women in the labour market and in their personal life (Folbre, 2006). Consistently, Folbre (2012) rhetorically asked if in order to provide women with equal rights, *Should Women Care Less?* The author develops her dissertation around the need to encourage political and cultural changes to reconstruct femininity and masculinity towards 'de-gendered' norms of care. Putting it in Chant's terms: a *de-feminisation* of obligation.

Hence, the importance of disassociating the inherently human need of (providing and receiving) care from 'feminine' values became prominent in gender scholarship. To the emerging post-modern feminism, the preceding demands of feminist movements regarding women's UCW were insufficient to challenge the traditional division of labour (Rao, 2018). On the one hand, post-modernists distanced from the feminist liberal perspective because liberals demanded equality vis-à-vis men, namely women's access to 'men's work' (paid work), while denying the intrinsic injustice of the political and economic system. In their view, this reasoning neglected the importance and the highly demanding nature (in terms of time and knowledge) of care, and disempowered women with the resulting second (and third) shifts. On the other hand, the critique to radical feminists originated from their emphasis on differentiating women from the patriarchal norm. Elson (2017) argued that some requests in radical and Marxist feminisms, such as the *Wages for Housework Campaign,* perpetuated the narrative of women as essentially (and somehow, biologically) caring (Elson, 2017). Thus,

feminist post-modernism sustained that gender equality would not arise from neither emulating nor from distancing women's needs from the "men's norm", but from transforming (or even 'eliminating') the whole gender system and its understanding of women's unpaid care work (Rao, 2018).

3.1.5. Acting upon care

The transformation of gender roles regarding unpaid care also started permeating the analysis of development interventions. Case in point, the "development mantra" (Ghosh & Chopra, 2019, p. 471) of reaching women's empowerment via access to paid labour had proven insufficient to achieve gender equality. On this regard, Elson (2017) argued that in addition to an increased number of women in paid work, it urged a systematic approach: by involving the active participation of the private sector, trade unions, women's institutions, and governmental actors towards increasing men's participation in unpaid care work. This type of development intervention followed two different reasons. First, care is and will continue to be essential to human development; analyses of the amount of time spent in unpaid care work in developed countries, contrary to former predictions, indicates that technological advances in housework, and economic development do not necessarily reflect in reduced caring hours. According to Folbre (2013): "time devoted to direct family care seems to increase along with family income, and is largely unaffected by fertility decline" (p. 139). Second, the inevitability of care implied a more balanced distribution of obligation and its costs, but also of its benefits (Folbre, 2006). Society's organisation, formal and informal institutions should foster men's enjoyment of the personal and social retributions of domestic work (Folbre, 2006); that is, actively engaging men to support gender equality for the benefit of both women and men[3]. To make UCW valuable, it is necessary to appropriate it as a need not only for the one been care, but also for the carer.

The widespread concern on the required changes regarding UCW, motivated a theoretical approach that aimed to provide practical recommendations to improve women's

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[3] The idea of de-feminising care necessarily is strongly related to the discussions on masculinities within gender studies. To challenge gender roles and engage men in traditionally feminine activities, masculinities approaches highlight the importance of distancing from the gender studies approach that focuses only on women. They support the need to avoid seeing men "as the enemy or oppressors" (Lorentzen, 2011, p. 116); and for this case, as those who deliberately exploit women and benefit from women's UCW. Involving men in care work entails acknowledging the constraints experienced by men within the gender system, such as masculine expectations of suppressing emotions, not establishing strong relationships, and adjusting to traditional "emotionally distant, or violent" stereotypes (Jordan, 2020, p. 28). This study does not include theories on masculinities, though it reflects on the importance of re-evaluating gender roles, especially masculine identities, and redistributing UCW's benefits with men. A proper analysis of UCW from a masculinities approach should be part of future research.

conditions. Elson addressed her own critiques to economic development policies and proposed a model that considered feminists' historical demands on the caring labour. First, the model made visible and valuable the unpaid care labour as WID, and Marxist feminists' political causes had done. Second, consistent to the GAD's and empowerment approach concerns on the power relations dictating women's private and public life, this framework acknowledged the disadvantages and consequences for human development that women faced due to the extra-burden. Third, it assigned shared responsibility among people and institutions by understanding the importance and inevitability of the caring labour that economics and feminist groups had led, as well as the intrinsic costs and benefits implied in caregiving. Elson (2017) presented her ideas before the United Nations' 53rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women celebrated in New York in 2009 as the 'three Rs framework' (3Rs) or the 'Triple R Framework' (Esquivel, 2014): Recognise, Reduce, and Redistribute unpaid care work.

Valeria Esquivel (2014) describes the important changes to be encouraged in care as an institution via the 'Triple R Framework'. In terms of *recognition*, it is crucial to consider "who is doing unpaid care work, and how much" (p. 434). Specifically, addressing the gender roles and cultural norms that make women the main providers of care, and (consequently) challenging the power relations, which would ultimately contribute to women's empowerment. Hence, UCW recognition does not only concern private scenarios, but actions in the economic, social, and public structures of care (Esquivel, 2014). The challenge for UCW *reduction* is based on the importance of providing women better guarantees in terms of time, health, and wellbeing (Esquivel, 2014). To achieve these outcomes, governments and organisations should contemplate efforts in planning and implementation of labour-saving and infrastructure projects. Though, the combination of UCW reduction and redistribution may simply be insufficient in places in which even after redistributed, the care workload is too heavy for family members. Thus, only by engaging the multiplicity of actors that should be accountable for care measures (Esquivel, 2014), society will reach the required level of *redistribution.* Yet, care as a gendered social structure, will not be redistributed if "the gender stereotypes that associate care with femininity" (Esquivel, 2014, p. 435) are not challenged. According to (Elson, 2017), the involvement of the international community in this quest is therefore essential.

The '3Rs Framework' became a standard in gender interventions, and development plans for governments, NGOs, and multilateral institutions (Elson, 2017). Organisations such as UNDP (Elson, 2017), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the

Empowerment of Women (UN Women, 2016), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, n.d.), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL, 2020), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2019) have used the 'Recognise, Reduce, Redistribute' formula in their initiatives in order to promote women's empowerment, especially, in economic terms. In 2013, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights of the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona (2013), recognised how "this heavy and unequal responsibility for unpaid care is a barrier to women's greater involvement in the labour market, affecting productivity, economic growth and poverty reduction" (p. 4) and urged "States […to] adopt all necessary policy measures in order to achieve the *recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work*" (emphasis added) (p. 17). The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2018) has also adopted this model in its guidelines for decent work for care jobs by acknowledging that "care work, both paid and unpaid, is at the heart of humanity and our societies" (p. v). In the report, ILO (2018) emphasises on the importance of measuring all types of care work, investing in high quality infrastructure for care, and promoting alternative gender roles to promote gender equality in the private and public spheres. Moreover, the report adds two additional 'Rs' for care work valuation: Reward (to provide fair economic compensation to care employees) and Represent (to guarantee care workers' participation in the "social dialogue and collective bargaining") (ILO, 2018, p. xliii).

The discussion regarding women's unpaid care work has taken place from different fields of knowledge. The contributions and critiques to this issue arose from economics, feminisms, development and gender studies. Together, and commonly contrasting, they provide a framework about the need to recognise the material and human dimensions of care work, which have contributed to women's rights deprivation and gender inequality. This review aims to frame the present analysis in the ideas of care work as an invisible (or, *invisibilised*) force within of the economy. Furthermore, it shows how women's subordination structures may be created and sustained by the current conditions of unpaid care work; hence, these power structures go beyond the economic system, and permeate private spaces. In addition, it presents an understanding of care work as a crucial task and institution for human development and on how its current conditions affect women.

3.2. Delving into empowerment

3.2.1. Development and empowerment

The concept of *empowerment* became important in development studies as a revindication of people's role in determining their own fate. During 1980s, the 'one-size-fits-all' development model of the modernization theory and the welfare approach were proving counterproductive for people's interests in the developing world: debt crises and poverty persisted despite the intentions of SAPs (Rowlands, 1997). Consequently, in the 1990s, development studies experienced a transition towards alternative processes of development where dialogue and participation of development beneficiaries were the basis (Rowlands, 1997). Hence, the idea of "bringing people who are outside the decision-making process into it" (Rowlands, 1997, p. 13); that is, *empowering* people, became popular. Scholars began using the concept of 'empowerment' when talking about social change by referring to grassroots struggles that aimed to unsettle inequalities in power relations (Cornwall, 2016). This *bottom-up* approach elicited the importance of transforming political, economic, and social structures; a position to which feminisms and gender studies were not foreign (Tiessen, Parpart & Marchand, 2017).

To bring about the required social change for women's empowerment, feminist scholars criticised the conventional definition of *power* (Rowlands, 1997). Traditional sociological approaches define power as "the ability of one person or group to get another person or group to do something against their will" (Rowlands, 1997, p. 9). In other words, *power* conceived as *power over* someone; a form of control that frequently leads to subordination. Feminist interpretations of this definition point out that throughout history women had been excluded from power. This exclusion has resulted in a dynamic of women's oppression and women's acceptance of themselves "as persons of lesser value" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 440), a concept known as *internalised oppression* (Cornwall, 2016). However, feminist authors conveyed that such understanding of power was inconvenient for feminist causes. First, this perspective sees power as a zero-sum game; where one part gets what the other one loses (Rowlands, 1997). Consequently, it nurtures the idea that women will gain power only at the expense of men (Rowlands, 1997). Secondly, the idea of *power over* leaves out its relational nature and transformative potential (Cornwall, 2016). Thus, feminist scholarship does not only analyse women's subordination (the distribution of power), but also proposes a way to transform such relationships.

During the 1990s, feminist authors used the concept of empowerment to explore the transformative nature of power. As explained, to feminist authors power was not merely domination, it was a way to generate social change. Thereupon, within gender studies, empowerment reflected the need to promote an agenda towards transforming power relations and encouraging gender equality (Cornwall, 2016). Some authors defined *empowerment* as *power to*, as "increasing one's ability to resist and challenge 'power over'" (Kelly, 1992 as cited in Rowlands, 1997, p. 12). To dismantle oppression (especially, internalised oppression), women needed to motivate critical consciousness that could only be reached by acting together (Cornwall, 2016). Hence, other feminists asserted that the concept of empowerment differed from *power over*, as it involved a sense of *power with* that recognised the relational nature of power, and encouraged collective action (Cornwall, 2016). Another strand emphasised that empowerment could not be given, instead, it had to be self-generated (Kabeer, 1994), it was *power within*. After the increased visibility of empowerment, the term gained substantial ground in the mainstream development agenda.

3.2.2. Gender and empowerment

The recognition of the need to change social structures in favour of women's rights was well-received within gender academia, but it also generated concerns. The excessive popularisation of the term could jeopardize the transformative potential of empowerment (Cornwall, 2016). Empowerment as an indicator of development and gender equality, such as the United Nations' Gender Empowerment Index (GEM), could motivate an idea of a fixed state, of an outcome that could be given, instead of coming from within (Kabeer, 1994). Therefore, the idea of empowerment as a process was promoted by several feminist authors such as Batliwala (1994) and Kabeer (1994). Srilatha Batliwala (1994), an Indian scholar and activist, indicated that empowerment was "a process of challenging power relations, and of gaining greater control over the resources of power" (p. 130). She also claimed that by recognising empowerment as a process, societies would become aware that it could be reverted, and that it changed according to women's specific needs. Naila Kabeer (1994) focused on the idea of power within, this idea was similar to Batliwala's (1994) understanding of power as control not over people, but over means to decide. According to Kabeer (1994), empowerment as a process also indicated a change, a transition (Kabeer, 1999) "to build women's sense of autonomy over their own life-choices" (p. 94). Such feeling was hardly measured by standard development indicators, which commonly reflected the definitions of empowerment of those behind the indicators (Kabeer, 1999). The ideas of as

empowerment as a process were also close to a parallel critique to traditional women's development interventions.

A gender analysis of development programmes demonstrated that including women did not necessarily contribute to structural changes in power relations. Moser (1989) denounced that international development agencies were implementing programmes supposedly on behalf of women's rights, but commonly at their expense. On the one hand, within the *welfare* and the WID programmes (*antipoverty* and *efficiency* approaches), women's reproductive and community work were used in poverty alleviation and economic development. The resulting unremunerated work of these initiatives ultimately trusted in a presumed elasticity of women's time and reproduced the power relations of women's subordination, as women were conceived mostly as mothers and wives (Moser, 1993). This was explained by Moser as the *triple burden* (1989), the multiple roles that women performed in developing countries, and that were frequently ignored by gender planning. On the other hand, the projects that did prioritize equity for women in development (*equity approach*), commonly overlooked social norms, and failed to transform women's life in the long run. Moser (1993) explained that what those projects generally attended were women's *practical* needs, namely, basic needs such as water, food, or income. Moser (1993) asserted that practical needs were "the needs women identify in their socially accepted roles" (p. 40), and consequently, their fulfilment did not challenge women's subordination to men. On that matter, the author explained that gender and development programmes should recognise the needs women had as a consequence of their subordinated position (Moser, 1993). These were the *strategic gender needs* (Moser, 1989; 1993), and referred to the necessity to transform the power dynamics sustaining gender divisions of labour, pay gap, and domestic violence.

These ideas were included in the *empowerment approach,* a novel understanding of gender and development interventions that echoed the discussions around power. Moser's (1989) empowerment approach differed from the traditional rationale of gender planning as it recognised women's triple burden, their practical and strategic needs, as well as their subordination not only to men "but also of colonial and neocolonial oppression" (p. 1808). Moser's approach was also a theoretical framework that challenged Western and liberal forms of feminism that ignored the Third World realities and intended to achieve gender equality through *top-down* strategies. According to Moser (1993), the failure of the equity approach was that instead of supporting women's empowerment—so they could satisfy their particular strategic needs—, its interest was in gaining equity for women in comparison to men or to women with different needs. Likewise, the empowerment approach concentrated

the ongoing debates regarding power in development by addressing the need to bring women from 'outside' to inside the decision-making processes, to challenge *power over* with *power with* and to generate *power within* from a bottom-up mobilisation.

The issue on how to measure women's empowerment in development interventions is still contested. Naila Kabeer (1999) had addressed this difficulty by criticising community disconnected indicators. Nonetheless, she also argued for purposes of accountability, a framework was needed for assessing the impact of development initiatives on women's empowerment. For the author (1999), *empowerment* could also be understood as *"the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability"* (p. 435). Consistently, to measure empowerment, and in line with Batliwala (1994), the author proposes an analysis of different dimensions that ultimately define "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to the" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437) (*empowerment*). First, as a 'pre-condition' to empowerment, it was necessary to analyse women's access and control over *resources*—material, human and social. Once the preconditions were examined, the process of decision or *power within* was to be examined. Kabeer calls this ability to decide and negotiate *agency:* "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). According to Kabeer (1999), *resources* and *outcomes* "refer to as capabilities: the potential that people have for living the lives they want, of achieving valued ways of 'being and doing'" (p. 438). The outcomes that result from the pre-conditions and process are referred as *achievements* and are analysed in light of their impact on the individual and structural transformation of the previous (*unequal*) conditions. This perspective is consistent with Moser's (1989) analysis on gender planning, where the implementation of programmes addressing *strategic* (in contrast to *practical*) needs aim to challenge the existing subordination of women.

The idea of empowerment has been debated by development studies, and by gender and development studies. Through an alternative understanding of the concept of power, feminist authors created a theoretical framework that has served as a basis to address women's needs in the short and long term, and within Global South settings. This study will use previous academic discussions and theories to analyse how NGOs' initiatives concerned with women's UCW in rural Rwanda align with the theories of women's empowerment and gender equality.

4. Methodology

To achieve the objective of analysing how Rwandan NGOs' actions upon UCW align with the theories of women's empowerment, this study implemented a qualitative approach with a flexible research design (Nygaard, 2017; Bryman, 2016). I used data concerning the NGOs' initiatives regarding women's UCW in Rwanda and analysed the perceptions and actions of NGOs and their relation to theories on women's empowerment. One major research activity was the analysis of documents on NGOs' actions regarding UCW, as well as the 2010 and 2021 Rwanda's National Gender Policies. The other research activity was in-depth qualitative interviews with NGOs' representatives working in rural Rwanda. I undertook an inductive analysis with the aim of establishing a connection between the data and theory regarding women's empowerment, and gender and development studies. The analysis of the secondary data and public policy was used to argument on how NGOs' initiatives align not only with women's empowerment theories, but also with the governmental position on UCW. In sum, this research explores how NGOs' initiatives on UCW can be conducive to the promotion of women's empowerment, and ultimately, gender equality in Rwanda. This case study was not designed to provide an exhaustive recount of all the initiatives regarding women's UCW in Rwanda, but to analyse them in light of women's empowerment and gender equality. This exercise is relevant as it shows both the perceptions and actions of important actors (NGOs) in Rwanda's development and gender equality initiatives.

4.1. Sampling

This research used a purposive non-probability sampling using a two-levels fixed criteria: NGOs developing (or that had developed) initiatives towards the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of women's UCW (first level concerning unit) in Rwanda (second level referring to context) (Bryman, 2016). Due to the specificity of the chosen criteria, a combined strategy of opportunistic, and snowball sampling was implemented (Bryman, 2016, p. 409). In the initial stage I identified NGOs developing women's UCW-related programmes using information from academic papers, international organisations' reports, and NGOs' Websites. I created a data-base compounding the organisations' name, type of programme, and contact information, and exchanged e-mails and calls with NGOs representatives to inform them about the purpose of the project and checking for their availability and willingness to participate. In the second stage, I contacted the identified NGOs through e-mails, instant messaging, and video-calls, and asked them in regards of further NGOs and organisations

working upon UCW in Rwanda (Bryman, 2016, p.145). This process was developed during July and August 2020. After these two months, no new NGOs appeared in documents or were mentioned by representatives; this situation was useful to define the sample size: "Essentially, the criterion for sample size is whatever it takes to achieve saturation" (Bryman, 2016, p. 417). As the snowball sampling showed no other organisations were implementing UCW-related project in Rwanda, the chosen NGOs were sufficient to accomplish the research objectives. The organisations that satisfied the two-levels fixed criteria were:

- **ActionAid Rwanda:** An international NGO based in the United Kingdom. It has developed projects for women's economic empowerment in Rwanda with a '3Rs' approach: recognize, redistribute, and reduce unpaid domestic work. They provide resources and training programs for income generating activities, early childhood development, group saving schemes, etc. (ActionAid Rwanda, n.d.).

- **Rwanda Women's Network:** A Rwandan humanitarian NGO whose objective is to promote and improve women's socio-economic conditions. The organization has implemented leadership and empowerment projects in Rwanda (Rwanda Women Network, 2017).

- **RWAMREC:** The Rwanda Men's Resource Centre is an NGO created in 2006 with that promotes gender equality through non-violent identities of men and "healthy masculine behaviours" (RWAMREC, 2021, p. 1). They develop projects in rural Rwanda to eliminate gender-based violence and to engage fathers in care work (Doyle et al., 2014).

- **CARE International:** An international humanitarian organisation with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. This NGO has worked in Rwanda since 1984 with disaster response, food and nutrition, health, and education and work. Since 2017, the organisation has closely worked with local NGOs in areas of women's empowerment and poverty alleviation (CARE, 2020).

- **Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe:** This is an umbrella of civil society organisations that work collectively for "advancing the status of women" (Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe, 2019a, p. 3). Pro-Femmes develops projects "on gender equality focusing on unpaid care work" (Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe, 2019b, p. 6) in Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda with the purpose of empowering women.

- **Oxfam International:** This international organisation was founded in 1942 in Oxford, United Kingdom. Oxfam has worked in Rwanda since the 1960s by supporting development projects on "humanitarian response, conflict management, and sustainable livelihoods projects" (Oxfam International, 2021a, p. 2). In alliance with the University of Rwanda, this organisation built biodigester plants to reduce the amount of firewood needed and the cooking time as "unpaid care work is one of the biggest causes of time poverty for women" (Oxfam International, 2021b, p. 10).

Ultimately, I was able to contact ActionAid Rwanda, Rwanda Women's Network, RWAMREC, CARE International in Rwanda, and Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe, and all of them accepted the invitation to be part of this research. I was unable to reach Oxfam International, despite multiple calls, and e-mails, since they were forced to close their office in Rwanda due to the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic (Beaumont, 2020).

Due to the remarkable gaps in terms of life standards that exist between the Kigali district (urban), and the rest of the country, the activities and impact of these organisations in the Rwandan territory is mostly rural based. Hence, the conclusions that arise from this study apply (to a major extent) to Rwandan rural areas. The term "women" in what follows in this text will be understood as women from the rural areas of Rwanda who either have participated in NGOs' UCW initiatives (beneficiaries) or lived in the areas of influence of the NGOs (potential beneficiaries) —unless expressly stated. The category of "woman" corresponds as well to cis-gender women, as there is not enough data (by the NGOs and academic literature) to describe the situation of UCW for trans-, non-binary, or queer women in the specific case of Rwanda. Sexual orientation was also a category that was not considered in this research (women are assumed to be in or to be interested in heterosexual relationships). Thus, mindful of the oversimplification this assumption means, the data of this research as well as its discussions, conclusions, and policy recommendations do not reflect the specific needs of lesbian, bisexual, or asexual women (and other LGBTQA+ individuals). It is noteworthy that scholars have expressed the high levels of discrimination against the LGBTQA+ community in Rwanda (Moreland et al., 2019), and that protections and rights such as same-sex marriage are not considered in the legal framework (Equaldex, 2021).

4.2. Data collection

The data collection of this study included two main research activities. First, I conducted five semi-structured individual interviews with the NGOs representatives (Bryman, 2016, p. 466). The communication with NGOs' representatives, both written and oral, was entirely in

English (participants manifested feeling completely comfortable/confident). The interview guide (Appendix 1) was written in English, and included 13 questions, and observation guide that aimed to assess the theoretical approach NGOs proposed in their perceptions and actions with regards to unpaid care work in Rwanda and women's empowerment. Prior to the interview, participants received an Informed Consent Form (Appendix 2) as stipulated by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). There they received details regarding the purpose of the research, the research procedures, their involvement in the project, and the terms of confidentiality. Participants signed the document or expressly agreed on the terms via e-mail or instant messaging. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to travel to Rwanda and do fieldwork there. Thus, the interviews were conducted from Norway while the participants were in Rwanda between September and November 2020 through Zoom video-call, and WhatsApp instant messaging (when needed) and their duration was between 45 and 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded (prior informed consent by the respondents) and later transcribed for analysis, and the information supplemented with field-notes taken during and after the interviews to facilitate the data analysis (Bryman, 2016, p. 585). Second, I revised NGOs' reports as well as the Rwandan National Gender Policy (due to the close relationship between the government and NGOs' actions) to gain context understanding on how the chosen actors view and represent the problem and their interventions. Specifically, I made use of text excerpts that were specific about the actions and understanding of UCW in the context of rural Rwanda. The set of research activities was therefore useful for analysing the actors' views on UCW, the legal framework relevant to UCW, and NGOs' strategies and understandings around UCW.

4.3. Data analysis

For data analysis, I implemented a thematic analysis as it "is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). After reading the transcriptions and field-notes to get a general overview of the information available, I started open-coding the interviews (Bryman, 2016, p. 588; Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 350). I identified topics that were recurrent ('coding up'), namely: *gender roles*, *empowerment*, *cultural norms*, *economic perspective*, *GBV*, *relationship with the government*, *masculinities*, and *gender equality*. Subsequently, I created some labels based on the theories on UCW and women's empowerment ('coding-down'), and contrasted the data in the interviews accordingly, such categories were: (based on Elson's (2017) UCW '3Rs Framework':) *recognise*, *reduce*,

redistribute; (based on Kabeer's (1999) empowerment dimensions:) *resources*, *agency*, *achievements*; (based on Moser's (1989) gender planning analysis:) *practical gender need* (PGN), and *strategic gender need* (SGN). After revising the initial topics and labels, I chose to use *recognise*, *reduce*, *redistribute* as the themes in my thematic analysis. These higher-order codes would let me explore the topics and theories on women's empowerment (sub-themes) on each type of initiatives regarding UCW in Rwanda. In order to organise and synthetise the data, I used a Framework (Ritchie, Spence & O'Connor, 2003, p. 219 as cited in Bryman, 2016, p. 585) designed in Microsoft Excel matrix. Hence, I developed a content analysis approach based on a systematic examination of the collected data, and triangulation based on the secondary data (NGOs reports, public policy, and theory) to increase trustworthiness and to bring about a research grounded in the extant literature (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 262) on gender and development studies.

4.4. Limitations

Different circumstances limit the development and scope of this research. First, this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, a phenomenon that limited the research design. Though useful for interaction with NGOs' representatives, on-line interviews tend to be limited in time as compared to personal interviews and restrict other sources of data such as non-verbal communication, environment, and setting (Bryman, 2016). Additionally, Internet connection in some areas of Kigali presented technical problems, which led to interruptions that made comprehension, in some cases, difficult.

Second, due to the inability to travel to undertake fieldwork in Rwanda, I was unable to interact with NGOs beneficiaries and the Rwandan community. This created a gap within the possibility of triangulating the information on women's empowerment with the actual women involved in these programmes represents the most critical limitation of my thesis. Consequently, the findings of this research do not aim to illustrate the actual impact of the UCW initiatives in women's lives; this assessment should be part of further research.

Third, this research is based on a small-scale sample, and its findings correspond only to the reality of the rural Rwanda. Nevertheless, the applicability of the study beyond the case is related to the potential transferability of similar initiatives in comparable contexts (Berg & Lune, 2012, p.329), especially in the Global South. The interview sample was not balanced in terms of gender: four out of the five interviewees were men, which leads to possible bias with respect to the perceptions on women's empowerment and gender equality. After finding this sample composition, I actively tried to access interviews with more female representatives,

but due to the increased responsibilities NGOs had with the pandemic, it was not possible. I compensate this issue by triangulating the information with academic literature and reports written by women.

4.5. Ethical considerations and epistemological positioning

The contact with the participants was based on the principles of confidentiality and privacy. As stated in the Informed Consent that was distributed to the participants, their names, positions, and other personal information that can lead to identification will be anonymised to respect their privacy. The names of the organisations will be visible in the results of this research as per participants' and NGOs' request, and the final version of this text will be shared with them for academic and policy purposes within the organisations.

The axiological framework of this research is based on the theories of feminisms. Likewise, feminist theory is not only the basis of the theoretical framework of the research but also "intrudes" (Bryman, 2016, p. 35) the motivation and the research question of the study in line with principles of gender equality. I therefore situate this research within critical theory as the "communication of these findings promotes progressive social change" (Murray & Overton, 2003, p. 23). This research is based on a constructivist ontological position that sees *reality* as a set of socially constructed realities (Bryman, 2016, p. 33), in this case portrayed by NGOs. Consistently, the epistemological positioning of this study is interpretivism as it understands "the subject matter of the social sciences… … [as] fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences" (Bryman, 2016, p. 26). Accordingly, I trust on qualitative research methods and the use of concepts and language and acknowledge how the researcher's understanding of the world also shapes their interpretation.

Some of the reflections that result from this study are consistent with the postulates of African feminisms (Zirion Landaluze & Idárraga Espel, 2014; Mekgwe, 2007)[4]. This study acknowledges the importance of African feminisms in the construction of their own definition of women's empowerment, but due to the scope of this research, I do not include the ideas of these theories and political movements. Considerations on the ideas of women's empowerment in African feminisms and unpaid care work should be part of further research.

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[4] Some African feminisms criticise feminist Western perspectives that insist on a women-based approach of gender studies and leave little room for discussions about men's roles: "to succeed as a humane reformation project, it cannot accept separatism from the opposite sex" (Mekgwe, 2007, p. 169). According to Zirion Landaluze and Idárraga Espel (2014, p. 50), one of the defining characteristics of African feminisms is avoiding the exclusion of men from feminist practices: the success depends not only on influencing conscience of women, but on collaborating with male colleagues.

5. Discussion: *The UCW's 'Tripe R Framework' and Women's Empowerment in Rwanda*

This chapter will describe the perceptions and actions of the NGOs regarding UCW in Rwanda. I will discuss how the way they understand and respond to development and gender challenges align with the theories on women's empowerment. Through the analysis of NGOs' reports and the Rwanda's National Gender Policy, I will examine the connection between UCW and the gender equality model in Rwanda. This chapter is divided in three sections: *Recognise*, *Reduce*, and *Redistribute*, that correspond to Diane Elson's (2017) 'Triple R Framework' on the actions for making UCW more equitable for women and better adjusted for the society in general. As presented in the background chapter, different international organisations and governments have included two additional 'Rs' in this formula: *Remunerate* and *Represent*; yet these are not as widespread in academic literature and within the NGOs. Consistently, some considerations on remuneration and representation will be presented within each section; though, a further analysis of these types of interventions should be considered in future research. The next sections are further divided into two parts in which one includes a description of NGOs' perceptions and actions, and the other a theoretical, and gender equality and policy discussion.

5.1. Recognise

Early theories on caregiving activities arose from the advocacy of making women's work visible and relevant (Benería, 1999; Boserup, 2007). These discussions contributed to recognising UCW as a valuable activity, especially in economic terms. The theoretical contribution of the academic strands of WID and of the Marxist feminists was in this period focused on *recognising*. Although other challenges emerged as the academic discussion evolved (e.g., the discussions around women's subordination within their households, and the cause for de-feminising care work), UCW recognition (by academia, governments, and international organisations) became crucial for awareness-raising. Consistently, the practical approach promoted by Diane Elson (2008) puts recognition as first in the 'Triple R Framework' on the strategies to address UCW. As explained by Esquivel (2014), recognition implies considerations on "who is doing unpaid care work, and how much" (p. 434), addressing the gender roles and cultural norms that make women the main providers of care, and (consequently) challenging the power relations. The importance of promoting UCW recognition derives therefore from its relation to women's empowerment: in order to "challenge the power relations"—'empower', in Batliwala's (1994, p. 30) words; or

'satisfying strategic gender needs', following Moser's (1989)—that sustain the gender inequalities in care, it is necessary to "recognise that caregiving is a critical social function" (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2014, p. 15 as cited in Esquivel, 2014, p. 425).

A country such as Rwanda which takes pride on the role of women in development, the recognition of the value of UCW is still a challenge for gender equality. The cultural norms that frequently link femininity to caring have consolidated (and praised) the identity of women as caregivers (*mutima w'urugo*). This situation has left the country with a balance of power that disempowers women: without policies and public valuation that concede the economic and social recognition of UCW. The efforts made by the Rwandan NGOs in the recognition of UCW include actions in the economic, social, and public structures of care (Esquivel, 2014).

5.1.1. NGOs' perceptions and actions on UCW recognition

NGOs acting upon UCW have contributed to recognising who is doing UCW, and how heavy such burden is. The leading organisation in actions for women's UCW is ActionAid Rwanda (AAR) who has focused on measuring women's unpaid workload and on spreading the message of its importance. Additionally, AAR published in 2020 its National Level Research in which they measured the amount of time that women and men spent in unpaid caring and domestic activities both in urban and rural areas of the country. As explained in the background chapter, the results of this research show a disproportioned care burden shouldered by women, where in the most serious cases women spend about six hours per day in housework (compared to two hours performed by men) (ActionAid Rwanda, 2020a). Through these statistics, AAR has worked to raise awareness at individual-, household-, and governmental levels. With the information found in the research, AAR organises workshops on the recognition of UCW: in their 2018 management report, they stated: *"we celebrate the fact that both men and policy makers are shifting their attitudes towards women's (UCW) Unpaid Care Work."* (ActionAid Rwanda, 2018, p. 7). In their 2019 report, AAR informed that they had conducted time-diary surveys and advocated for the recognition of UCW. During 2019, they organised awareness-raising programmes with about 28,142 community members promoting the *"understanding of the whole concept of UCW burden because of AAR sensitizations and engagements"* (ActionAid Rwanda, 2019, p. 20). This study is also used and often quoted as a policy blueprint by other NGOs in the creation of advocacy and cooperation platforms that contribute to 'the R' of *representation.*

Women's civil society organisations have called attention on the gender roles and cultural norms that hinder the visibility and valuation of UCW both inside and outside households. Recognising that women's unpaid burden is actual work (and thus, a fundamental economic activity in society), and that inequality in distribution represents an obstacle for women's empowerment is therefore a priority for these organisations. NGOs in Rwanda agree on the invisibility of the role of women as caregivers within households; they point out that UCW is usually overlooked by family members in general. In fact, UCW can be invisible for the women who are themselves performing it; commonly, due to traditional gender roles, women do not see caring activities as work. Participant 4 (P4) highlights that the recognition of UCW needs to start by making women conscious of its value: *"... Our initiatives are [...] showing the women in understanding the importance of the work they do, how they contribute to the economy of the country, how they contribute to the well-being of the families, the beginning of a journey of they themselves recognising their work".* According to this respondent only in those terms, women will be able to influence their families and the local authorities to recognise the importance of care work.

NGOs' representatives recognise that the biggest challenge is bringing awareness to male family members on the contribution of UCW is one of the biggest challenges. The respondents agree on men not perceiving housework as a real job, Participant 1 (P1) manifested*: "when a woman from the morning until the evening does unpaid care work [...] the husband himself doesn't recognise unpaid care work as work".* On this regard, Participant 5 (P5) representative mentioned that unless women receives a monthly income, their husbands do not recognise their daily activities as work: *"we talk to that man [...]He says: my wife is at home,[...] the woman is from the morning till the evening [...] struggling with household care, work, taking care of children, taking care of sick people, taking care of animals in the house, going in the field, doing some activities in the field, and the man says: 'my wife doesn't have a job'".* The interviewees highlight that one of the major problems with care work is it is undervalued unless women are remunerated. P5 mentioned that a common situation is *"when [... men] come home they say [... to women]: What do you do? What do you do? What do you do here?"*, referring to men not considering care work as an actual contribution to the household as it does not bring in an income.

Particularly, when care work is done for other individuals (outside the household) and is remunerated, it is valued: *"when [...] care work is paid, you can earn money, if you work for others. [Though,] you can't earn money if you work from home. [Thus]no one appreciates or recognises that it's work"* (P1). P5 confirmed this observation: *"this kind of mindset [(not*

recognising UCW)] also accelerates that kind of unpaid care work, but when it's rewarded, people recognised that those women have their job." This issue is also connected to violence against women: according to the NGOs representatives, when household members fail to recognise UCW as an essential activity, women are more likely to suffer from gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. P1 mentions that when women do not have a paid employment, they are commonly victims of psychological and physical violence, that their husbands justify by saying that *"they [(women)] eat without contributing"*.

At the community level, NGOs also report that women struggle to feel that caring activities are recognised. To NGOs, this situation is linked to the absence of an appropriate policy on UCW, and the fact that the economic value of care is not reflected in the country's GDP. This situation has consequences in the allocation of budget and policy making; and hence, some of the local organisations advocate, along with international NGOs, for estimating a monetary value to UCW, and promoting initiatives towards the protection of women (CARE, 2020). According to P1, achieving recognition of UCW will be difficult in the short-term as within national statistics women exclusively dedicated to unpaid care work *"… are counted as part of the inactive population… Like they don't belong to the active population"*. This observation was also brought by Participant 2 (P2): *"for your information, in Rwanda there is no policy around unpaid care work"*, and Participant 3 (P3): *"[UCW] does not actually count in the broader economy […] that kind of work is not accounted."* This situation is validated by the Rwandan National Gender Policy (MIGEPROF, 2010); the document addresses the main problems regarding gender inequality and patriarchy in the country, and states that one of the *"overarching issues"* is that *"the contribution of care economy in GDP that is not expressed in economic terms"* (p. 14).

UCW recognition in the Rwandan context also takes the form of challenging power relations through influencing the government and household dynamics. NGOs' efforts towards making UCW visible commonly include advocacy and representation before governmental institutions such as MIGEPROF. Specifically, these organisations promoted the creation of a policy on the issue of care and warned about the urgency of recognising UCW and the importance of making visible its value in the local economy, according to P5: *"To women's unpaid care work, [… and for the] process […of] advocacy. The thing is how can this unpaid care work be recognised in the national domestic product."* AAR reported in 2018 as their results in advocacy: "UCW has been integrated in the draft gender family policy" (ActionAid Rwanda, 2018, p. 9). In spite of the active campaign by NGOs before the national government for creation of a policy on UCW, the 2021 National Gender Policy did

not include this initiative. However, some of the changes that were integrated will be explained subsequently.

Despite the discrete changes in regulation, NGOs' actions have proven effective at household levels during last months. In 2020, the organisations found that the context of the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging the power relations that restricted the recognition of UCW at the household levels. AAR reports that even though the pandemic increased the demand of caring activities (mostly for women), there has been a shift of recognition towards UCW. In their 2020 May-June report, one of the male beneficiaries interviewed by the NGO declared: *"I had never realised domestic chores and care responsibilities are that difficult until this lockdown [...] I would always blame my wife for being idle, but I found I was wrong. I personally realised that our wives are unsung heroes given the hardship they go through while juggling with various home chores that we, the men never recognize."* (ActionAid Rwanda, 2020b). In the interview, P1 also talked about this situation: "*... before [the pandemic,] men were not interested [... in] these kinds of messages, but because everyone was regulated [(in lockdown)] [...for] family members [it] was an opportunity [...] to listen [to] these kinds of messages. We pass them through the radio, the media channels... [...] It was an opportunity for the family members to see how the wife is overworking"*. The civil society organisations agree that the potential of this recognition will be visible in their initiatives towards reducing and redistributing.

NGOs' perceptions on UCW recognition align with academic literature, and specifically, with its conditions in the Rwandan context. UCW in Rwanda is mostly performed by women with consequences to their wellbeing, economic independence, and ability to decide. These organisations highlight the challenges for making UCW visible inside and outside households and warn how inaction in recognition has negative consequences for both women and society. Seeing women as detached from the economy, when UCW is the basis of human and economic development, increases GBV, produces lack of governmental regulation and support for care workers, and restrict women's opportunities. To prevent these circumstances, NGOs do research, raise awareness at all levels in society, and advocate with the local and national government. The consistency of these actions with women's empowerment theories will be analysed in the following part.

5.1.2. UCW recognition and women's empowerment

To analyse the contribution of the recognition of UCW women's empowerment, it is useful to use Kabeer's (1999) framework on empowerment. This theory encompasses three dimensions

of empowerment: access to resources, agency, and achievements. By the recognition of UCW as *work*, NGOs can change the perception of UCW from an *obstacle* to a *source of empowerment*. With this, I do not propose an essentialising understanding of UCW in which women should feel empowered merely by the act of taking care of their families and community. On the contrary, I believe UCW can contribute to women's empowerment by expanding their ability to make choices (Kabeer, 1999). To this day, most Rwandan women struggle to find UCW an empowering force (UCW distances women from education and paid jobs, to name but a few) because despite supposedly being the *owners* of this 'human capital', gender roles and social norms restrict women's capacity to *access* and *control* the caring labour as a resource that can empower their own lives.

If resources, as a dimension of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999), allow women to expand their choices, UCW could be considered a resource. Precisely, despite of the lack of recognition of the economic contribution of UCW at the household level; the Rwandan society does perceive paid care as work. This line of thought demonstrates the *"conventional economic sense"* (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437) of UCW and explains the importance of the social mobilisation that NGOs lead for care work remuneration. Although NGOs representatives agree, achievements in remuneration are far from reality in Rwanda: *"So far, I cannot say that we have a success story in rewarding women's unpaid care work."* (P5). Nonetheless, this is not only about material resources, but about the resulting *"multiplicity of social relationships"* (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437): a community of caregivers and a society aware of women's rights and of the value of their work have the potential to transform power structures collectively. More precisely, the relations that arise in the conversation are a resource that can contribute to (the 'R' of) representation.

Consciousness about the knowledge and time women devote in housework and caring activities could change the perception of UCW from a *burden* to a *resource* that women can access and control for their own benefit. The research and awareness-raising campaigns developed by NGOs are contributing to portray UCW as a resource: valuable within the families and an option as income generating activity. Though UCW as a 'resource' is not implicitly included in NGOs' narratives; it is commonly referred to as women's *"contribution to the economy"* (P4). Likewise, women acknowledge the opportunity costs they experience by not using their working hours in paid jobs outside their households and perceive the value of care work. Although UCW recognition does not provide immediate material resources to women, such recognition makes women (and society) aware that they have indeed more resources available (their labour) than it is traditionally perceived.

Consequently, the understanding of UCW as actual work can also help women increase their agency at household and social levels. By recognising the 'resources' they contribute with to the family, women can increase their bargaining power (bringing P1's testimony: *eating because they are contributing*), and thus, their decision making. To Kabeer (1999), a way to measure women's agency is by *observing* "their roles in relation to specific decisions" (p. 445). Hence, the perception of care workers as active economic actors (even when they are not remunerated) can reduce GBV and give women 'a voice' to negotiate and challenge power relations in private spaces. The efforts in representation and advocacy also contribute to decision-making in public spaces: these actions not only recognise women's UCW, but also its consequences in gender equality. Likewise, the cooperation platforms built by the NGOs regarding UCW also increase "women's participation in public action" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 445).

Finally, UCW recognition can also lead to empowerment achievements. To Kabeer (1999), 'achievements' constitute the perceived improvements in women's well-being. NGOs report well-being outcomes of beneficiaries after participating in their UCW workshops: the Rwandan community is "*shifting their attitudes towards women's (UCW) Unpaid Care Work*" (AAR, 2018, p. 5). One could argue that inequalities are not solved by recognition alone; however, empowerment achievements can also be observable by improving women's "*ability to access information, take decisions, and act in their own interests*" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 448). Therefore, if the number of women and community members recognising UCW is increasing, the way NGOs' actions are presented is consistent with Kabeer's (1999) theory on women's empowerment. The way NGOs' position aligns with the ideas of empowerment constitute an important element in the Rwandan gender equality model, though it is equally important to analyse the role of the government in this process.

The governmental position on UCW recognition is based on the idea that care work is (only) an obstacle for women in the process of women's empowerment. The government acknowledges the gendered nature of caring activities: "*this increases women's workload which hinders their engagement in other productive activities*" (MIGEPROF, 2021, p. 24), and so, they understand that women's caring activities represent a hurdle for their access to training and formal employment. The 2010 National Gender Policy mentioned this aspect in the constraints for gender equality: "*Heavy reproductive workload preventing women from getting time to participate in decision making and other political, cultural and economic activities*" (MIGEPROF, 2010). In the 2021 National Gender Policy, this approach did not change, the term 'unpaid care work' only appears in the policies to "*accelerate women's*

economic empowerment" as an obstacle to women's participation in *"entrepreneurship and business development"* (p. 36). The governmental version of UCW recognition is one that shows how care work hinders (their definition of) empowerment: women's participation in traditionally masculine spheres. Yet, this interpretation distances from the NGOs' version that portrays UCW as a potential resource, and a source of agency and transformation for women's wellbeing.

The close relationship with the NGOs could elicit in the government recognition initiatives that depict UCW as a source of empowerment and less as (exclusively) an obstacle. This type of recognition could start by acknowledging the NGOs' demands for the establishment of an UCW policy and the inclusion of care work as part of the country's economy. By considering UCW in Rwanda's GDP or measuring an estimate monetary value for care—as suggested by ILO, 2018—would recognise women's unpaid work not as an activity outside or against the national economy, but as a labour that makes it possible. Case in point, seeing UCW only as an obstacle leads to paradoxes such as the occurred in Rwanda: reducing paid maternity leave from twelve weeks to six weeks—this happened while having a female-majority in parliament (Abbott & Malunda, 2016; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). The consequences of this shift in interpretation would put UCW at the core of the gender policy and for the protection of women who can use UCW as a source of empowerment. These efforts would also contribute to paid domestic workers (mostly women and girls), who due to lack of regulation, cannot access a minimum wage and better labour conditions.

Recognising is therefore not only acknowledging that women undertake most of the housework and caring activities both at home and in the community. Recognition also implies perceiving UCW as an essential work for human development that should therefore be a source of empowerment for those doing it. This perception can lead to programmes and policies that do not reproach the alleged consequences of UCW in the national economy (distancing women from paid employment), but that understand UCW's real value for Rwandan economic and human development. In this sense, the selected NGOs' efforts for the recognition of UCW in Rwanda align the three dimensions of empowerment as they advocate for a type of care work that expands women's resources, agency, and achievements (Kabeer, 1999). Previous considerations are not to say that the path towards recognising (and consequently acting upon) UCW in Rwanda is without difficulties. First, NGOs' actions are limited, and the results are measured in terms of the number of people participating in their campaigns. Yet, and specially without direct information from the beneficiaries, it is hard to confirm to what extent access to information represents actual changes in women's resources,

agency, and achievements. Second, as NGOs' observations and academic literature (Desbusscher & Ansoms, 2013) indicate, cultural norms in Rwanda are difficult to change because of the narrative of women as intrinsically caring. Third, the NGOs' initiatives seem insufficient when the governmental position is not yet completely aligned with the idea of making UCW visible and valuable, and not undesirable for women's productive life. However, promoting a recognition discourse that inspire women to see and use the care they give as a source of empowerment (opposed to merely an obstacle) supports and demonstrates the need to use UCW to expand women's ability to make choices.

5.2. Reduce

Recognition alone will not solve the gender equality associated with UCW, if actions and policies towards reducing women's workload are not undertaken. The need to reduce UCW became visible in feminist literature with the academic discussions that warned the consequences of a disproportionally heavy workload in women's lives. Most of these pleas arose as a result of the increased participation of women in the paid labour during the 1960s and 70s, and the reduction in governmental support for basic services that came with SAPs (Elson, 2002). Such conditions incremented women's workload: they added work outside the household and multiplied the already heavy domestic obligation. The concepts of *double burden* and time-poverty became popular after the Beijing Conference recommended governments to carry out time-surveys measuring women's contribution to the economy (Rao, 2018; Folbre, 2013). This information nurtured the theoretical debates around the incidence of UCW in women's human development: time poverty results in reduced leisure time, education, and participation in public actions (Conelly & Kongar, 2017). Elson's (2017) 'Triple R Framework' included the need to reduce care work as a way to provide women with better conditions in terms of time, health, and wellbeing (Esquivel, 2014).

In accordance with academic literature, women in Rwanda are the primary caregivers (Rohwerder et al., 2017), which means they give up time for themselves (leisure, paid job, education, and training) to take care of dependents (family and community) (Chant, 2008). Women therefore have had the dual burden of 'income poverty' and 'time poverty' (Conelly & Kongar, 2017) because they are often forced to reduce their 'productive' employment and (consequently) their income (Chant, 2008)—as well as their time for education, or simply for other activities or leisure. Hence, reducing women's care burden has been a big part of Rwandan NGOs' actions upon women's UCW.

5.2.1. NGOs' perceptions and actions on UCW reduction

The actions implemented by the NGOs reflect their perceptions on the impact that UCW has over Rwandan women, especially in the rural area. These organisations aim to empower women by supporting and creating UCW programmes that promote women's economic development, health, and life free of violence. To these NGOs, the main observation that motivates reduction strategies is UCW's incidence in women's time poverty. Consistently, NGOs have focused on the labour-saving infrastructure investments to alleviate women's burden.

   In contexts of poverty, and rural environments UCW is considerably more demanding due to the absence of appropriate infrastructure for the provision of basic needs such as water, and electricity. As caring activities are a gendered activity, these conditions increase women's workload, on this regard P1 observed: *"Imagine: going out for setting home, collecting the fire in the forest, in the afternoon you cook, you wash clothes, and then you fetch water for home because developing countries it's not like in Norway or Sweden, where life situation [... has] improved a lot…"* Thus, investing in labour-saving facilities has become a priority for NGOs acting upon UCW. In 2019, AAR reported that *"2,085 women [were] supported with energy saving cooking stoves, [and] 180 families connected to clean tap water."* (ActionAid Rwanda, 2019, p. 9). During the interview, P5 highlighted the importance of the work done by NGOs in supporting the harsh conditions of women in the rural areas: *"[... they give] women the water tanks so that they can collect the rainwater and use it instead of going to fetch water, the areas that they can travel a long distance, and also giving them some of the improved cooking stoves that can help them to reduce the fuel"*. With these interventions, P1 claims that *"the main outcomes are the [reduced] time on unpaid care work for the direct targeted groups; reduced from 7 to 4 hours a day, and their economy due to those time-saving interventions increased between 8 and 12% per annum, per year."* P1 also highlighted the contributions to time-poverty reduction through water facilities *"so that time of fetching water is removed. That time saved [they use] it for some economic initiatives, so [...] they [can] spend that time to productive activities, with economic activities."* AAR informed in its 2018 the connection of labour-saving investments and women's access to paid jobs: *"enabling them to save time to use on income generating activities"* (ActionAid Rwanda, 2018, p. 16).

   The interventions in infrastructure do not only aim to solve time poverty; they also contribute to women's wellbeing in the form of fighting violence against women and

protecting their health. P1 affirmed that women and girls face risks of physical and sexual violence when they walk long distances for accessing water and fuel for house chores. In particular, the interviewee mentioned the case of the private forests that women have to trespass (due to the lack of woodlot caused by overpopulation) in order to get firewood: *"So they normally collect firewood in the forest [...] so sometimes the forest owners find them and beat them, but not only beating, also harassing them."* Such long distances and heavy workloads also represent a problem for women's health, such situation was mentioned by P3: *"these initiatives, actually contributed to reduce the burden of unpaid care work, [... with consequences on...] women's health, for example. [... As] they use traditional cooking means, they use firewood, and this has consequences on their own health, respiratory issues..."*

Another strategy NGOs use to fight women's time poverty is providing services that assist women in traditionally feminised activities, such as childcare. AAR's work in the rural areas of Rwanda has adopted the strategy of building day care centres where women can take their children and caregiving activities are undertaken by hired caregivers. P1 explained: *"where their children are taken care of and we pay for the caregiver's monthly payments so that those caregivers hired to take care of the children... [so] the mothers [can] go for productive work; for paid work".* To 2019, AAR had built *"3 childcare centres established to reduce women's UCW burden"* (ActionAid Rwanda, 2019, p. 17) that "help women access work opportunities and achieve a positive balance" (Rohewerder et al., 2017, p. 3). The importance of childcare centres as a way to give women access to paid work was highlighted by P1: *"We work on this issue to ensure that is balanced in time and equally as their male partners to get the time for school, to get time for work, so that really they can become economic independent".*

Clearly, NGOs argue in favour of the reduction of UCW since it hinders women's access to a paid employment. As women spend most of their day in caring and domestic chores, they lack the time to find a remunerated economic activity that can assure their economic independence. To ActionAid (2020a) UCW is the basis of the *"time poverty which limits women's opportunity to learn how to increase sustainable productivity and how-to better access markets; to know how to claim their rights, and to participate in decision making which affects control over their resources."* (p. 7). P1 also emphasised on how UCW diminished women's economic opportunities: *"if you do unpaid care work for your entire life, of course there is no opportunity to do paid work, and there's no time to go to farm, to productively do farming activities, because [there is]no time.",* and P5 affirmed *"[the NGO*

is] very concerned about women's unpaid care work because it's one of the areas that are preventing; that are limiting women to effectively participate in women's economic empowerment programmes." When asked about the importance of acting upon UCW, P4 claimed*: "Of course we act upon the unpaid care work because we believe women must be economically independent".*

In this sense, NGOs promote income-generating activities for women to combat time poverty (and income poverty), as part of their strategies for UCW. ActionAid Rwanda (2018) provides *"small scale income generating activities to fight poverty and restore their [(women's)] dignity"* (p. 25). This organisation also distributes resources such as livestock to vulnerable families *"for increased manure and income diversification"* and builds selling points *"to enable women have a safe space to sell their products"* (ActionAid Rwanda, 2019, p. 18) and *"to increase bargaining power and income"* (p. 26). When asked about the strategies that the NGO implemented for recognising, reducing, and redistributing UCW, P3 mentioned (besides other initiatives) the efforts that aim to support women's economic empowerment: *"[We] invest in income generating activities and we also provide them with skills in entrepreneurship, and education…"* According to the interviews, poverty alleviation is usually among civil society organisations' main targets in women's empowerment; consistently, I found a frequent association of UCW reduction and providing access to productive work. This relationship will be expanded upon in the following part.

On the whole, NGOs in Rwanda agree on the importance of reducing women's UCW as a means for contributing to their development, eliminating GBV, and taking care of their health. Yet, the most common perception is that reduced care work is the doorway to productive (remunerated) work, and therefore, out of poverty. To achieve these benefits, NGOs work closely with the government in labour -saving initiatives (especially in water and electricity infrastructure), childcare centres (that also promote care remuneration), and income-generating strategies. Next part will contrast these perceptions and actions with ideas on women's empowerment.

5.2.2.   UCW reduction and women's empowerment

To understand how the actions that aim to reduce UCW support women's empowerment, I will analyse the NGOs' narratives based on Kabeer's (1999) resources-agency-achievements framework, and on the actual transformation of the gendered power relations (Moser, 1989) that these development and gender programmes facilitate.

The initiatives promoted by NGOs in Rwanda regarding women's UCW largely focus on the provision of resources to women in the form of material assets and human resources (social networks) that can reduce their domestic burden. The main concern for the organisations is time poverty; this vision understands time as a resource whose possession has traditionally been denied to women. This form of intervention is based on giving women back a *resource* (time) they can "translate into the realisation of choice" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 444). By addressing this issue, NGOs aim to foster women's pre-conditions for empowerment; that is, the "minimum amount of disposable time in addition to a minimum amount of disposable income" (Conelly & Kongar, 2017, p. 11) that guarantees certain freedom for decision and action.

These initiatives also provide women access to *material* resources; preconditions to "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic choices" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). As explained, labour-saving interventions offer women basic needs such as water and energy, and therefore support their development. In fact, poverty alleviation, as argued by Kabeer (1999), contributes to empowerment as poverty is intrinsically connected to the inability to make choices. ActionAid Rwanda (2019) reports that their beneficiaries express how these initiatives are a source of empowerment: *"I am an empowered woman, I have electricity in my house, I also have tap water in the compound" (*p. 36). These projects therefore transform the range of possibilities ('empower') of rural families in Rwanda, in terms of livelihoods, human development, and mainly, time availability for economically remunerated activities. Nonetheless, it is debatable the extent to which giving access to these resources effectively supports women's empowerment as individuals, or merely as the caregivers of their households and communities. This discussion raises questions on women's agency in the UCW reduction strategies.

In Kabeer's (1999) words, empowerment, as a "process of change" (p. 437) is not completed only by assuring its "pre-conditions" (resources). For women to actually use their *power within* (their own "meaning, motivation, and purpose") (p. 438) as *power to* (challenging the existing power relations), development and gender interventions would have to expand women's alternatives. NGOs perceive their projects as supporters of women's agency: in their view, infrastructure investments, and other reducing strategies such as the day care centres, expand women's decision-making regarding their use of time. P3, for instance, affirmed: *"We also work with training in technical education, training… that's the agency; the way we build, contribute to building the agency"*. Moreover, when asked about the impact of their interventions in expanding women's decision-making, P4 related

economic independence and agency: *"...helping women become economically independent, it also gives them the power of decision-making at their home level."* P1 answered: *"We already achieved those results [... with] the time-saving and energy from unpaid care work, with the trainings on leadership, [...] empowerment activities, [...] so they [(women)] train on leadership, and increase their confidence to stand for the elections, so the positions really are increasing for the women."* Evidently, for the analysed NGOs, access to the resources of time and basic needs expands women possibilities to decide on the transformation of their own lives via education, and consequently, paid jobs and political participation. However, whether these resources and interpretation of agency favour well-being outcomes (*achievements*) (Kabeer, 1999) raises questions about the idea of empowerment.

It is common to mention UCW reduction as a way to "make space" in women's workday for other activities that can contribute to their development, and that of their households and communities. Yet, the extent to which "extra" time leads to gender equality and empowerment achievements (Kabeer, 1999), and whether women's agency is determinant in the allocation of such time requires a more in-depth analysis. For NGOs it is a natural path that women's freed-up time is to be used in paid jobs and in public actions. Indeed, NGOs' reports show this may also be the line of thought that beneficiaries themselves follow (ActionAid Rwanda, 2019, p. 33): *"One of Women's group facilitator decided to engage in paid works after receiving different trainings on economic development. She is currently a retailer of fruits and vegetables in Murundi selling point."* The expansion of choices may be reflected in their ability to decide on using their time in income generating activities; although that their decision adds more working time to their lives contradicts the goal of expanding their choices (exercising agency) and somehow takes away the resource they have been provided with (time). Case in point, reducing UCW to increase other type of work both in the private (productive and reproductive labour) and the public (political participation) spheres may only perpetuate the *feminisation of obligation* (Chant, 2006). Putting it in the Rwandan context: this development narrative sends the message that women are empowered when they fulfil their role as "spiritual and moral centre of the house" (Burnet, 2012, p. 42).

To measure empowerment achievements as women's ability to fulfil (besides reproductive) productive, and community obligation—*triple burden* (Moser, 1989)—jeopardises women's empowerment. Actions related to UCW reduction are counter-productive when they end up increasing women's working hours, and thus, endangering—in Amartya Sen's (1985) words—*capabilities* (resources and agency) (Sen, 1985 as cited in Kabeer (1999). This risk is a challenge for NGOs in the Rwandan context, where "women

[already] felt they were overworked and unable to rest – they felt unable to get all their work done in time, and felt very stressed and tired because of this" (Chopra & Zambelli, 2017, p. 34). The goal then would be that by giving access to income generating activities and training (more working hours and obligations) NGOs do not contribute to the already high of workload that associated with "too little sleep, chronic fatigue, and mental stress" in women (Chopra & Zambelli, 2017, p. 34). Although some interventions reduce hours of heavy work, they do not necessarily free up women's time (the contrary), a situation that creates a problem of "time poverty", not in the economic, but in the human rights and human capabilities sense, what Chopra & Zambelli (2017) called: *'No Time to Rest'*.

Therefore, the narratives proposed by the NGOs regarding UCW reduction propose a gender and development model that may end up not prioritising women's empowerment. These organisations present time invested in training, paid work, and community activities as *achievements* and tangible indicators of women's economic empowerment. The resulting advancements in economic independence and political representation may be globally accepted empowerment indicators, especially in the context of an LDC. Nonetheless, this model relies on the "elasticity of women's time" (Moser, 1993, p. 57) and therefore resembles more the *efficiency approach*—"women [are] seen entirely in terms of delivery capacity and ability to extend working day" (p. 57)—and the *anti-poverty approach*—"to meet PGN in productive role, to earn an income, particularly in small-scale income-generating projects" (p. 57)— than it does the *empowerment approach*. That is to say, an UCW reduction strategy with an exclusive focus of reallocation of working time (from unpaid to paid) focuses on women's *practical needs* (guaranteeing women's and their families' basic needs and income) instead of their *strategic needs*. The current approach of the UCW reduction initiatives, although effective in promoting economic independence, may fail to transform the gender dynamics that feminise household and community obligations.

This focus on reducing UCW and creating income-generating activities as ways to eliminate obstacles to women's economic development is consistent with the governmental perspective. The government also perceives reduced domestic workloads as an opportunity for women to engage in paid employment, and training activities. The previous National Gender Policy described several fronts to act towards "economic empowerment for employment, growth and markets" (MIGEPROF, 2010, p. 23). The policy included different objectives to be promoted in areas such as food security, supply-chain transformation for local and export markets, and economic empowerment for rural women. In the "Care Economy" front, only one objective was presented: "To reduce significantly the number of

women in care economy through training and value addition for their products. Trained women can invest in income generating activities through facilitated access to credits and other production means" (MIGEPROF, 2010, p. 24). And when acknowledging the lack of infrastructure, the gender policy limits the issue of heavy UCW to the consequences in others' development: "this affects the time that women could use for other activities for the development of their own families and communities" (MIGEPROF, 2010, p. 16). The recent National Gender Policy relates the low "participation of women in entrepreneurship and business development" (MIGEPROF, 2021, p. 36) to the "heavy involvement of women in domestic activities including unpaid care work" (p. 36) and highlights the importance of investing in infrastructure projects as a means to put women in paid jobs persists. When referring to the lack of alternative sources of energy, the policy points out: "this increases women's workload which hinders their engagement in other productive activities" (MIGEPROF, 2021, p. 25). The governmental authority connects the UCW reduction exclusively with women's ability to contribute to the economy through paid jobs.

In sum, there is a clear 'reduce to produce' narrative from the NGOs, which is also consistent with the governmental position. "Women's empowerment through paid work has become a development mantra" (Ghosh & Chopra, 2019, p. 471), but this narrow focus does not only compromise strategic gender needs; but may also undermine the advancements in UCW recognition. In the Rwandan context, by drawing attention from the issue of unpaid work (when discussing women's empowerment), the interventions can also send the wrong message of 'development equals taking women out of UCW and into paid work'. This discourse can minimise the impact of UCW in human development and neglects the fact that regardless of the labour-saving interventions (or other efforts to reduce it), UCW will always be a human need. Development interventions must consider that women engage in UCW not because they live in low-income households (high-income households also require UCW; only it is common that they hire lower income women to do it), or (only) because they do not have other skills. Women shoulder the care obligation essentially because UCW is necessary, requires knowledge and time, and is undeniably gendered. By perceiving UCW only as an obstacle, and not as a crucial labour for human development (Nussbaum, 2000), gender policies and gender planning can be reduced to force women to—in Folbre's (2012, p. 597) words— "care less".

Besides neglecting women's agency over the use of time, and the recognition of UCW as inherently human, another consideration that 'reduce to produce' ignores is the benefits that come from carrying out UCW. In line with the discussion in the 'Recognise' section, UCW

should not be considered only a hurdle for women's empowerment. Indeed, as illustrated by Folbre (1995), there is an intrinsic motivation for doing care work that is related to social and family needs. This can be destroyed or weakened when discourses and policies prioritise paid work. For instance, Chopra and Zambelli (2017) found in rural Rwanda that even though women receive economic benefits, family bonds and time to rest can seriously be threatened when engaging in extra paid work. As expressed in a testimony: "I get home tired and now I start doing the unpaid care and there is also a client who wants me to help repair his or clothes (sic) and my baby wants to breastfeed, so it becomes too much for me…" (Chopra and Zambelli, 2017, p. 30). Even though the analysed NGOs did not mention the benefits that women experience for doing care, these types of scenarios reveal an idea of what can happen when women are required to 'produce' by giving up necessary caring hours. Caregiving is so feminised that analysing the benefits that 'non-caring women' lose is virtually impossible in the context of rural Rwanda. This may be the reason why NGOs do not mention the inherent benefits that women perceive from UCW, except when contrasting with those that men do not receive for being disconnected from care work. This will be explored in depth in the 'Redistribute' section.

Some of the initiatives presented by the NGOs prioritise women's economic empowerment and do not pursue specific objectives regarding UCW, whereby demanding outcomes in UCW reduction would be inappropriate. For instance, economic empowerment measures including women's training, financial literacy programmes, and entrepreneurship and leadership programmes that do not focus on women's UCW. The expansion in women's range of choices that these and the UCW reduction-oriented programmes enable is undeniable; women can access the resource of time, basic material assets, and with the support for accessing paid job, to income. However, an overrepresentation of this type of interventions may bypass basic needs such as minimum time for rest and leisure (Kabeer, 1999) and the conditions for women *"to live the lives they want"* (p. 437). Income-generating activities, training programmes, and political participation do not solve the issue on UCW; they may help solving one of its consequences (that women cannot access paid jobs), but by solving practical gender needs, they can overlook UCW's challenges in terms of strategic gender needs. Likewise, women's empowerment programmes, both those focused on UCW and those focused on women's economic empowerment, may be contributing to women's triple burden (Moser, 1989).

The efforts made by the studied NGOs to reduce UCW support women's empowerment by expanding their resources and agency capacity (usually related to income).

In addition, these programmes benefit the fight against violence against women, and the protection of her health. The environment in which these initiatives take place (rural communities from an LDC country) has fuelled the discourse that is already common in gender and development interventions of 'paid work equals development'. This position is shared with the Rwandan gender policy, where over the years the government has insisted on the need to reduce UCW as a means to increase female participation in the labour market and, consequently, to support Rwanda's economic development; a speech that I have called 'reduce to produce'. This perspective undoubtedly constitutes a step forward for the economic wellbeing of women. In fact, through income-generating activities, NGOs have successfully increased the income and economic independence of women (practical gender needs). Nonetheless, the consequences (beyond economic benefits) could be harmful for women's empowerment dimensions and strategic gender needs. By increasing workload, development interventions can risk women's time (a valuable resource): the use of this time for purposes other than those of productive work (or training for productive work) such as rest or leisure of the 'freed-up' time is not actively mentioned by the NGOs; for which women's agency in this situation is also questioned. These types of projects seeking to 'take women out of UCW and put them in the labour market' rely on women's 'elasticity of time', and though they could solve some of the problems associated with UCW (e.g., income poverty), they omit the issue of gender inequality that UCW brings. The 'reduce to produce' speech recalls the erroneous connotation of UCW as (only) an obstacle. Relying on this approach could neglect considerations such as the undeniable human need to (despite advances in infrastructure and poverty alleviation) care and even the benefits that women perceive in this. The next section will explain the potential that efforts that UCW redistribution have in supporting women's empowerment, as well as gender equality.

5.3. Redistribute

The recognition of the feminisation of obligation that fuelled the efforts of UCW reduction also laid the foundation of theories and activism that advocated for disassociating care from femininity. Previously, Marxist feminists had demanded economic remuneration for women's household work (*Wages for Housework* campaign); what they considered the basis of the patriarchal and capitalist exploitation (Rousseau, 2016). However, other theorists such as Nancy Folbre (1995) and Diane Elson (2017) criticised the essentialising nature of such political cause, which (first) could perpetuate the caring narrative associated with women and (second) was ineffective for redistributing both the costs and benefits of care work.

These strands also highlighted how UCW is a fundamental component for human development, even after reducing UCW to minimum levels (i.e., with labour-saving investments), some labour-intensive caring activities were necessary—"time devoted to direct family care seems to increase along with family income, and is largely unaffected by fertility decline" (Folbre, 2013, p. 139). Elson's (2017) 'Triple R Framework' establishes that UCW costs have to be redistributed "at multiple levels" (Esquivel, 2014, p. p. 423): including other family members, the community, and the government. By redistributing care, families and society experience changes in power dynamics for the benefit of both women and men. Redistribution therefore promotes an alternative idea of women's empowerment and gender equality consistent with the idea of making care an empowering force.

Considering the *feminisation of obligation* common in the Rwandan society (inside and outside households), NGOs implement strategies to guarantee that care is a common concern and responsibility. Hereafter, I will detail the NGOs perceptions and social interventions regarding UCW redistribution, as well as their connection to women's empowerment and Rwanda's gender equality model.

5.3.1. NGOs' perceptions and actions on UCW redistribution

To NGOs, redistributing UCW is a process that promotes gender equality by cutting down women's workload and involving new actors in caregiving activities. Therefore, the NGOs' actions focus in assigning care tasks to other family members (especially men), to the community, and to governmental organisations.

First and foremost, NGOs perceive redistributing UCW as a form of reducing women's UCW. As explained, one of the most recurrent observations by the Rwandan NGOs is that UCW is unequally distributed at home: women (and girls) carry out most of the domestic workload. Therefore, the recognition of imbalances in domestic work is an essential component of the NGOs' raise-awareness campaigns. For instance, RWAMREC's (2020) workshops focus on showing beneficiaries the need to redistribute housework among family members. This organisation asks the family members to name the house chores that are performed at home and to identify who is in charge of them. To RWAMREC, this exercise of recognition generates changes in the way the domestic workload is distributed; one of the men beneficiaries reflected on this: *"women have more than 29 works that are hard and unpaid while men have only 19 works and many of them are paid. I have decided to be sharing domestic activities because they are things even men can do and I hope this will facilitate my fellow men to emulate my deeds."* (RWAMREC, 2020, p. 1). NGOs in the

interviews claimed that their redistribution actions primarily contribute to women's wellbeing, P1: *"We work on this issue to ensure that is balanced in time and, equally as their male partners, to get the time for school, to get time for work, and* P2: *"we have a big role to contribute toward reducing the burden that the unpaid care work is putting on the lives of women".*

To achieve the benefits of reducing women's UCW, NGOs first level of the redistribution of domestic workload is within the household. Inside household redistribution can transform the family dynamics and contribute to healthier relationships: according to P4: *"... share responsibilities at the home level and encouraging communication so that families; couples kind of start discussing [...] about the economy of their homes, the well-beings of their families, and taking division of labour among themselves."* Hence, as the family members that invest the least amount of time in caring activities in Rwanda are men (Rohwerder, 2017), engaging them in UCW is the first challenge for NGOs, P1 pointed out: *"… there is a difference between men and women in terms of the workload in the housework. So, that's [(redistribution)] really a contribution towards gender equality."* On this regard, P3 mentioned: *"...including engaging men and boys to understand, to support gender equality, women's and girls' empowerment…"* As NGOs recognise, being able to engage men in domestic obligation (similarly to when women undertook traditionally masculine roles during times of crisis and after the genocide) would be consistent with the principle of gender equality that the country promotes. However, NGOs agree with academic literature (Doyle et al., 2014) on the rigid gender roles that keep women attached to UCW, and men apart from it.

The civil society organisations point out that women's identity in Rwanda has gravitated around caregiving activities and serving attitudes. This phenomenon was brought by P2: *"In the Rwandan culture, to be woman is to be submissive, respectful, to respect the husband, to cook, to fetch water, to take care of the babies, to do every household activity."* Likewise, UCW has been relegated to women and girls; P1 agreed: *"...our culture, that assigns full unpaid care work to women and girls",* and P5 recognised: *"the social norms, and cultural norms are the factors that keep accelerating the unpaid care work for women and girls."* This conditioning starts at a young age, the testimony of a girl was documented by RWAMREC's (2018) report*: "I have learnt this since my childhood, from my mother, my father and later on it became a natural thing that my brother could never sweep, cook, clean the house or do any other work apart from taking care of cows."* NGOs' respondents agree on how these stereotypes are one the main critical challenges for their actions in UCW. To women, UCW is valuable *(mutima w'urugo)*; P1 explains: *"You talk to them [(women)], they*

say that 'this is our thing, so we are happy to do it', so because of the culture, because of the beliefs, the cultural practices […] the ladies from their childhood they were educated to do unpaid care work, and they consider that unpaid care work is their primary…" This has not stopped women from assuming traditionally masculine roles but represents an obstacle for redistribution because women may be enthusiastic about accessing labour-saving interventions ('Reduce'), but not as interesting in assigning caring roles to men.

NGOs report a similar rejection when trying to involve men in care and housework. The gender narratives that prevail in the Rwandan context have crafted an idea of men that is unfamiliar to care work: *"from the childhood, boys were taught to not perform unpaid care work"* (P1); *"men will not feel concerned to get involved to household chores"* (P3). In contrast to the ideal "umugore" who is serving and caring, according to P2: *"…the husband, he has to be the provider, he has to go to the bar with other men to drink beer, he has to be tough, he has to be… to have multiple sex partners."* P3 clarified: *"men take care of finances […] they deal with… for example, driving or repairing cars, or home repairs like engineering, you know, that's a problem. That's actually a challenge, and that's how gender roles can affect women's situation when it comes to unpaid care work".* These rigid preconceptions of manhood have promoted civil society organisations to encourage other masculine role models as part of their redistribution UCW actions.

To engage men in UCW, NGOs advocate for the support of women's economic empowerment (RWAMREC, 2020), and for the promotion of "positive masculinity" (ActionAid, 2020b, p. 18). RWAMREC, the leader organisation in the promotion of gender equality through male engagement (RWAMREC, 2021), undertakes a 17-week programme with workshops that engage *"men in recognition, reduction and redistribution of Unpaid Care Works (UCWs) and domestic works for promotion of the Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)"* (RWAMREC, 2020, p. 2). In these efforts, they collaborate with other Rwandan organisations in redistributing as a form of reducing women's UCW*: "…to engage men to also support their wives in domestic work; taking care of children, cooking, cleaning, washing, and water collection or fuel collection, and other activities at the grassroot level at the villages"* (P5). Yet, to achieve this and other gender equality goals, NGOs work support men so *"they actually can be involved in household or family work and this where we can have redistributed housework in the families"* (P3). P2 reported how the training programmes trust local leaders to inspire the community to challenge traditional masculinities: *"[…]is a role model intervention for engaging men in […] violence prevention, gender equality, taking care of the children, and we use men into small groups of*

education at community level whereby fathers get together and discuss about domestic work, but also gender equality, violence prevention and many other topics."

According to the NGOs, the benefits of redistributing care and housework are also perceived by men themselves. The civil society organisations argue that by becoming "positive and supportive partners" (RWAMREC, 2019) and fathers, men can improve their partner and family relationships; and consequently, their economic and health conditions. P1 reported that men that participate in their workshops express that by sharing the domestic responsibilities, they are able to change violent masculine identities. According to P1, male beneficiaries agree that they reduce intimate partner violence, and thus, they are able to share work and decision-making with their wives: "*they testify how they benefited of sharing equal unpaid care work, no more violence, and also they discuss how to use the income, they decide together. That's why the income increase[s]."; "by removing that violence, that fight between wife and husband, [there] is a breath of peace among couples, and they work together.* This was confirmed by P5: *"sharing those household activities in the house will also contribute to the economic status of the family, of the household in general"*. P2 also expressed the reduced GBV that comes from sharing housework and caring activities also benefit men: "*to be mentally stable. To be healthy",* to improve his relationship ("*his couple relation becomes very good"*), and to have a better sex life: "*[a] man who is involved in unpaid care work enjoys sex with his wife [more] than other men…".* Another gender stereotype that men question when participating in UCW is the use of alcohol (a practise strongly related to Rwandan masculinity). As noted by P1: "*the good relationship around the couples [enables them] to work together and [to] not really waste resources [such as when…] men go out for drinking alone [… and] they use the money of the family…"*

The benefits of engaging men in care work demonstrate the potential for social transformation that redistributing UCW has. NGOs in Rwanda perceive how these benefits go beyond the private sphere: *"for example, […] transforming masculinities to make sure that men understand and are ready to support gender equality work "* (P3). P2 confirmed this observation: *"we have evidence that shows how our beneficiaries, especially men, who are living in a violent relationship, after attending our sessions, they have been transformed. Their masculinities have been transformed and they have become equitable and peaceful. So, we are seeing impact at the family level whereby families which were living in conflict and now living peaceful."* The way this participant and their organisation understand UCW redistribution is not only related to the costs it represents for women, but also to how it can transform the Rwandan society in some of its major challenges, such as IPV: *"fathers who*

are involved in taking care of their children become a positive and peaceful and non-violent. What they also become […] is mentally balanced, they become supportive to women's empowerment. So, they become gender equitable men. So, for us, we believe that unpaid care work is a game changer" (P2).

Another level in which Rwandan organisations redistribute UCW is outside the household. The programmes developed by the NGOs encourage the participation of the community, and advocate for the care responsibilities to be adopted by the government. Within the initiatives that seek to involve the society as a whole, the organisations mention the awareness-raising campaigns on challenging traditional gender roles. According to P3: *"This also involves community level reflections, to try to address change; get people to change their attitudes…"*, as well as the day care centres (explained in the Reduction section). Care centres turn UCW into employment, meaning, they promote the remuneration of caring services under employment conditions. Hence, these redistribution interventions support women relieved from the burden, while providing other women with better opportunities via formal jobs: *"those events [(raise-awareness workshops)] are the key venue for engaging different actors and the government; different actors in different areas. When this unpaid care work is rewarded, for example, it's a way the work being done by women has a reward, has a salary…"* (P5).

The NGOs' perspective is that UCW redistribution should also happen through governmental involvement. NGOs see the role of the government in UCW redistribution in two ways: first, through the support and communication regarding the importance of redistributing UCW within households: *because governments need to take some responsibilities in [how] the family members […] really equally share the tasks"* (P1). Second, through policymaking and budgeting so that public institutions assume care responsibilities and protect caregivers. In this case, NGOs actions focus on advocacy, and they claim this work has influenced the governmental actions towards UCW redistribution: P5: *"we also do advocacy with the government […on] how this unpaid care work can be redistributed…"* and *"2 major policy changes were effected; UCW has been integrated in the draft gender family policy and Government has increased agriculture budget"* (ActionAid Rwanda, 2018, p. 9).

In sum, NGOs' perceptions on UCW redistribution indicate that despite the advances in gender equality, rigid gender roles in the Rwandan society prevent women and men from equally sharing care responsibilities. Consistently, these organisations create awareness-

raising programmes, and support alternatives such as day care centres (also useful for UCW reduction) that make the community aware of the need to involve multiple actors in care work. Through this work, NGOs have found that UCW redistribution bring impactful benefits for women (UCW reduction), but also for men in the form of improved family relationships (e.g., reduced IPV), economic situation, and health. These perceived changes show the transformative potential of care both inside and outside households; what one of the participants referred to as: *'unpaid care work is a game changer'*. A further exploration of the implications of these actions for women's empowerment will be addressed in the following part.

5.3.2.   UCW redistribution and women's empowerment

The redistribution of UCW, as another form of reducing women's burden, provides women with additional choices in the form of access to paid jobs, public participation, and education that can contribute to their empowerment. However, the additional value that redistribution strategies provide is their potential for "challenging power relations" (Batliwala, 1984, p. 130) related to gender in private and public spheres. More specifically, working thoroughly to free women from the exclusive labour of care, and consequently (1) challenging the gender narratives that associate care work to femininity only, and (2) recognising the multiplicity of actors that should be accountable for care measures (Esquivel, 2014). "Redistribution" is therefore about acknowledging the importance of de-feminising care, in other words, attending strategic gender needs (Moser, 1989). Yet, "challenging the gender stereotypes that associate care with femininity" (Esquivel, 2014, p. 435) is a particularly disruptive approach in Rwanda's women's empowerment model.

NGOs' initiatives propose a shift in their interpretation of the conditions for women's empowerment. These organisations intend to challenge gender narratives not (only) about women, but about men. These gender interventions are particularly disruptive to the Rwandan gender equality model as they establish a relationship between women's empowerment, and men's involvement in traditionally feminised responsibilities. UCW redistribution strategies undertaken by the civil society organisations outline an alternative model that can be described as *masculinising care,* that is consistent with recent approaches to UCW (Folbre, 2013). By challenging masculinities, and promoting the benefits of men's participation in care (beyond facilitating women's participation in paid work), NGOs are developing a gender equality model that resembles Nancy Folbre's (2006) Gender Care Empowerment Index. In the author's words, "instead of measuring women's participation in the ''masculine'' sphere,

it measures men's participation in the ''feminine'' sphere." (p. 197). Likewise, what NGOs' initiatives on UCW redistribution demonstrate is that it is not (only) by giving women access to employment and public participation that women's empowerment will be supported: challenging masculinities will give other, as important, dimensions for women's empowerment.

The positive consequences that UCW redistribution has in women's empowerment (besides the direct benefits of UCW reduction discussed earlier) can be explained through Kabeer's (1999) dimensions. In terms of resources, the amount of time that women can invest in other activities as a result of UCW redistribution can be translated into paid jobs, public participation, and education. Yet, care redistribution, in a *masculinising* (de-feminising) sense, facilitates resources that come not from the non-worked hours, but from the social interactions that emerge in shared domestic work. In this sense, redistribution does not only give women access to resources (that are usually only available for men), but it also generates other resources. As mentioned in the previous part, NGOs report that by working on "positive masculinities" (ActionAid Rwanda, 2019, p. 40), women benefit from the increased economic resources available in the family, and that they tend to participate more in household decision-making. This observation is in line with Kabeer's (1999) example on how to determine advancements in women's pre-conditions: the "measure of 'access to resources' [… can be] based on whether women had a say in household expenses, cash to spend on household expenses…" (p. 445). By 'having a say' in daily life decisions such as paid work and expenses, women also experience an expansion in their decision-making, and bargaining power; important components of agency. Additionally, the reduction in GBV promotes *"a life free from violence"* (P3), a form of what Kabeer (1999) calls *negative agency*, namely, "people's capacity to define their own life-choices" (p. 438) (*power to*) without interference from other people (*power over*).

The achievements dimension of women's empowerment is related to women's well-being outcomes (Kabeer, 1999). Regarding the outcomes that come from *de-feminising* UCW, NGOs document the benefits experienced by women beneficiaries and their families. Civil society organisations argue that the transformations in gender roles are already visible in the Rwandan community; and that younger generations participating in their awareness raising programmes express the outcomes of rethinking traditional roles. RWAMREC's 2017 report presents the testimony of a male student who recognises how challenging gender roles can positively benefit women's wellbeing*: "My sister was with me in primary six. When it came time for sitting for National exams, my parents made her drop out school […] she should go*

home and support mom in household chores. After the training, I went home and told my parents that girls just like boys have the same rights to education […] As I speak now, my sister is back at school…" (RWAMREC, 2017, p. 17). In 2020, ActionAid reported that redistribution achievements followed the advancements in UCW recognition amidst the lockdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic, a man described how now he *"… bathes his two-year-old daughter. He says that spending about two months at home together with his wife proved to him how burden (sic) are unpaid care and domestic workloads"* (p. 17).

Women also express the well-being that UCW redistribution brings to their life (beyond economic advantages), one beneficiary gave this testimony: *"It brings joy when family members are redistributing household chores and care responsibilities; having my husband on board has really helped; it has also enhanced cohesion within our family"* (ActionAid Rwanda, 2020, p. 17). What this woman expresses as having her husband '*on board'* summarises the essence of de-feminising care. This idea of community that emerges from shared obligation resembles, again, the interpretations of empowerment as *power with*. By engaging men in care work, men can become allies, and advocate in gender equality conversations; thus, acknowledging the relational nature of power structures transformations, and encouraging collective action (Cornwall, 2016). After all, involving men is exactly what the Rwandan gender policy has proposed in both its 2010 (MIGEPROF, 2010) and 2021 (MIGEPROF, 2021) versions; a way to reduce GBV, and to promote gender and social transformation.

NGOs' UCW redistribution strategies therefore contribute to women's empowerment not just by giving women access and control to 'masculinised' environments or resources, but by challenging gender relations, especially in the private sphere. These programmes enhance changes in power distribution within households. This is visible in the work that NGOs promote regarding masculinities; men realise they can change *power over* for *power with* and *power to* (Cornwall, 2006). Changing *power over* means in the Rwandan context giving up violent behaviours (especially GBV), and challenging men's role as the sole decision-maker in the household. Hence, men go from imposing their decisions to involving women and other family members in decision-making, and from being taken care of (even at the expense of women's wellbeing) to taking care of themselves and of others. This transition exemplifies Rowlands (1997) understanding of power as not zero-sum (men increase their power by sharing it) and empowerment as *power to*. Thus, and as seen in NGOs' interventions, men are able to use their *power to* and *power with* to improve family and intimate partner relationships, increase household income, and protect their health and their families.

Despite the benefits, and tangible achievements that NGOs have found in UCW redistribution programmes, they are aware that to contribute to women's empowerment, de-feminising efforts that happen at household levels are not enough. First, as explained by Esquivel (2014), the combination of UCW reduction and redistribution may simply be insufficient in places (such as in the Rwandan rural areas) which even after redistributed, the care workload may too heavy for family members. Second, redistribution is only possible when there are more family members old enough to assume care obligations (although the girls actively participate in UCW). The problem here is that despite the Rwandan regulations and the NGOs initiatives are based on a heteronormative type of household, the circumstances of many families commonly differ from this model. Precisely, in *"Rwanda, some 28% of households are permanently headed by females"* (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2011). This is largely explained by the demographic imbalance caused by the genocide, but Berry (2015) also describes that due to rampant poverty, and the strict governmental regulations on home-building, "it is becoming increasingly difficult to get married in Rwanda" (p. 12). Under these conditions, redistributing UCW does not guarantee women's empowerment in a big proportion of Rwandan families. The insufficiency and impossibility to redistribute UCW explain, in the case of Rwanda, the need to "redistribute care at multiple levels" (Esquivel, 20124, p. 423).

NGOs focus their outside-households initiatives by redistributing care among the community and by advocating with the national government. The change in the government's perspective regarding involvement of men in gender equality issues and in UCW is visible in governmental policy. Even though the government emphasised on the need to engage men in gender equality in the previous gender policy (2010), it did not provide clear directions on how to do it, nor did it relate the issue with UCW. The 2010 policy recognised that one of the constraints to gender equality was related to "limited involvement of men in addressing gender-based violence and other gender related issues" (MIGEPROF, 2010, p. 18); however, it did not consider male engagement in UCW, only in GBV prevention*:* "The involvement of men in addressing GBV should be taken as key" (MIGEPROF, 2010, p. 20). Regarding UCW, the government recognised it was a gendered issue, and therefore proposed the need for labour-saving investment to reduce women's UCW, but it did not mention the importance of male participation in care obligations.

The NGOs' demands on expanding men's involvement in gender issues were incorporated in the family law, and in the 2021 National Gender Policy. The 2016 law on persons and family publicly stipulated that both husband and wife should share

responsibilities in household management: *"spouses jointly provide management of the household including moral and material support to the household as well as its maintenance"* "(Law N° 32/2016 of 28/08/2016 Governing Persons and Family, Article 209). This is a major advance in challenging intra-household gender roles, considering the 1992 Family Code that stipulated that men were the head of households and economically responsible for their family. According to the new National Gender Policy, the lack of involvement of men in gender issues can be explained by gender narratives that determine men's actions as well as gender interventions: *"men's resistance resulting from cultural norms, […]and […] approaches that are mainly skewed towards women and girls – ignoring the potential role of men and boys as key partners."* (MIGEPROF, 2021, p. 27). Accordingly, the gender policy explains how "the Government of Rwanda and partners have also invested more in men engagement through men and boys centred approaches" (MIGEPROF, 2021, p. 27). In this process, the government partners with RWAMREC promoting male participation in gender equality discussions.

The 2021 National Gender Policy differs from its predecessor as it recognises the need to challenge "cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and imbalances affecting the principles of gender equality and equity between women and men and girls and boys" (MIGEPROF, 2021, p. 20). Furthermore, it addresses the connection between positive masculinities, fatherhood, and redistributing UCW in the private sphere. Within the policy actions of the policy priority to "accelerate women's economic empowerment", the government describes: "design men and boys engage programs focusing on challenging negative masculinities, engaging participation of couples, *increasing men's role in positive parenting to ensure men gender responsive mindset towards a shared responsibility…"* (emphasis added) (MIGEPROF, 2021, p. 35). Nevertheless, to date, the National Gender Policy (MIGEPROF, 2021) notes with concern the "low involvement of women as compared to men" (p. 23) in entrepreneurship and business development, while the low involvement of men in (traditionally) feminine activities is mostly portrayed as an obstacle to women's access to paid work, so the policy proposes*:* "Engage men for increased participation in domestic chores *to allow women participate more in other productive activities."* (p. 43) (emphasis added).

The intrinsic value of challenging masculinities (by engaging men in UCW) for the sake of family dynamics, GBV prevention, and health (important conditions for women's empowerment) is not considered (or at least not directly mentioned) in the gender policy. This is partially because gender equality has fundamentally been defined by the Rwandan

government as women's involvement in traditionally masculine activities and is commonly referred as women's empowerment. Rwandan government's position therefore differs from NGOs' and from Folbre's (2006) interpretation of gender equality "men's participation in the ''feminine'' sphere." (p. 197). The idea of redistributing women's UCW to increase their productive work recalls the discussion about the risk of instrumentality in gender policies ('reduce to produce'). In the 'Reduction' section, I explained the risks of viewing reduction strategies only as mechanisms to increase women's paid work, and thereupon contributing to the triple burden. Here, these redistribution strategies can deaccelerate the advances in gender roles transformations and can become a mechanism to adhere working hours to women's day, and thus, missing the chance to challenge women's subordination and masculinities (strategic gender needs) (Moser, 1989).

I have argued how UCW redistribution programmes such as the day care centres can provide women with expanded choices (Kabeer, 1999). In terms of resources, these interventions can increase the income of both women relieved from the burden, and caregivers by removing obstacles to paid jobs (the former) or by directly giving them employment opportunities (the latter). Almost directly, these dynamics promote changes in women's decision-making process (agency) by reducing their dependence on violent intimate relationships and freeing up time for other productive and educational activities. When women's lives are benefited by these transformations, as reported by NGOs, it is possible to find empowerment outcomes (*achievements*) (Kabeer, 1999). However, the extent to which this redistribution strategies contribute to women's empowerment can also be analysed based on Moser's (1993) policy approaches on gender planning. If women experience increased income, and bargaining power, one can argue that day care centres are "a response to an immediate perceived necessity", namely, "practical needs" (Moser, 1989, p. 1803). By hiring women only for care work (as it is done by the centres), the NGOs-state work does not "challenge the gender division of labour" (Moser, 1989, p. 1804) and the consequent women's subordination, in other words, it does not fulfil "strategic gender needs". If NGOs and the state are acknowledging the public nature of care but fail to involve men in care and (thus) de-feminise care, these understanding of the initiatives hinders the potential for truly contributing to women's empowerment via a new gender equality model in Rwanda.

NGOs in Rwanda propose a model of UCW redistribution based on de-feminisation. This approach offers a view of empowerment centred in its original ideas of *power to* and *power with* that does not only support women's empowerment dimensions (resources, agency and achievements) (Kabeer, 1999), but also encourages the transformation of gender relations

both inside and outside households (strategic gender needs) (Moser, 1993). These efforts put first the need to involve men in care work both for their own benefit and for that of Rwandan society (reduced IPV and income poverty). The chosen NGOs' proposal differs from previous government positions that raised the need to redistribute only to the extent that it allowed the incorporation of women in productive economic activities. This government stance is consistent with a traditional model of empowering women as 'women in positions of power' but differs from recent UCW theories that conceive empowerment as men involvement in traditionally feminised activities (e.g., care work). Moreover, it may overlook that in a context like Rwanda (with high levels of poverty and female headed households), (intra-household) reduction and redistribution efforts may not be enough to support women's empowerment. Hence, and to bring UCW redistribution to all levels of society, NGOs advocate with the government for an alternative definition of empowerment and gender equity. Thus, the analysed NGOs have gradually managed to influence the government (gender policy) and work hand in hand to promote a model that makes UCW a transforming force for the country's gender equality challenges.

6. Conclusion

Rwanda has become a worldwide role model in gender equality and women's empowerment. As of today, Rwanda has the global leading position in female representation in parliament, but throughout history, the country has been marked by rigid gender roles that have put women in a submissive position. From the male domination promoted by the local culture, to the inherited (imposed) European ideas of women as 'docile and submissive', to the gendered conditions of the internal conflict, women in Rwanda have experienced violence and subordination. Notably, the role of women as *mutima w'urugo*—"spiritual and moral centre[s] of the house" (Burnet, 2012, p. 42)—became crucial during the post-genocide era.

The 1994 genocide changed femininity expectations and challenged women's role to respond to the ongoing social needs of survivors, widows, and orphans. After the genocide, the deaths and displacement caused by the extermination of Tutsis and moderated Hutu left the country with a 70% female population. This tragedy compelled women to participate in traditionally masculine roles such as paid employment, construction, and livestock management. The Rwandan State declared gender equality as a national principle in the 2003 constitution, and entrusted women with the responsibility for the country's post-conflict reconstruction and recovery. Moreover, the women's civil society movement that had emerged during the 1980s and 1990s economic crisis became crucial in providing the local population with basic needs.

As women engaged in activities that a few years back were unthinkable for *abagore* (women), the unpaid care work (UCW) burden became consequently heavier. Though women assumed more responsibilities in political and social spheres, housework and care work were not equally redistributed within households. The changes in gender roles that occurred in the public sphere were not reflected in private life. Local culture still demanded women to be the caretakers within their households, and the post-conflict plan required that in addition, they acted as carers of their community. Additionally, women's civil society organisations promoted a narrative of women's empowerment based on their role as wives and mothers. Thus, the country's development agenda came to be based largely on women's unpaid work. Therefore, unlike other women's civil movements, Rwanda's principle of gender equality did not pursue women's emancipation from care work, but rather scaled-up that serving role to the community.

The long hours of care work performed by women have consequences on their wellbeing. As in other countries, in Rwanda, unpaid work is responsible, among others

factors, for women's (and girls') reduced literacy rate, low participation in productive work (with consequences for poverty), and health deterioration. Thus, the NGOs, who have worked for the last 25 years to strengthen the social fabric of Rwanda, seek to support better conditions for women by recognising the inequalities that remain, despite the advances. These efforts are consistent with global campaigns to ensure that care work, necessary for human development, does not endanger that of women. The 'Triple R Framework' model presented by Diane Elson (2017) to the United Nations to address the challenges of UCW (Recognize, Reduce and Redistribute) has become a common practice for NGOs' initiatives on women's empowerment in Rwanda.

With this research, I inquired into the selected NGOs' approaches towards addressing the issue of unpaid care work among women in rural Rwanda and focused on how conducive they are to the promotion of women's empowerment. To achieve this research objective, I studied five selected NGOs that work in Rwanda in women's empowerment, gender equality, and economic empowerment. The selected NGOs are ActionAid Rwanda, Rwanda Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC), CARE Rwanda, Rwanda Women's Network, and Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe. I interviewed five of their representatives on the NGOs' perceptions regarding the situation of women's UCW in Rwanda and explored the actions that NGOs are implementing to recognise, reduce, and redistribute care work in rural Rwanda. Additionally, I compared NGOs' perceptions with the governmental position on UCW as indicated in the Rwanda's 2010 and 2021 National Gender Policies. Afterwards, I contrasted how the results aligned with theories on women's empowerment, mainly Kabeer's (1999) empowerment dimensions (resources, agency, and achievements), and Moser's (1999) strategic gender needs.

With respect to UCW Recognition, NGOs agree that UCW in Rwanda is mostly feminised with consequences for women's well-being, economic independence, and ability to decide. These organisations highlight the difficulties of making UCW visible inside and outside households. Also, they warn that if women are not *seen* contributing to the household and to economic development, gender-based violence increases and prevents the government from regulating and supporting care workers. To avoid these circumstances, all five NGOs included in this study conduct research, raise awareness at all levels in society, and advocate with the local and national governments. NGOs' actions on UCW recognition align with the three dimensions of empowerment, as they advocate for a type of UCW that expands women's resources, agency, and achievements that support making care valuable within the Rwandan economic and human development.

Nevertheless, the path towards recognising and acting upon UCW in Rwanda is not without difficulties. NGOs' actions are limited, and their results are measured in terms of the beneficiaries of their programmes. The civil society organisations' position differs from how the government portrays UCW. The National Gender Policy interprets UCW only as an obstacle to productive work, thus failing to make it visible and valuable. NGOs therefore are promoting a recognition discourse that inspire women to see and use the care work they give as a source of empowerment that supports and demonstrates the need to use UCW to expand women's ability to make choices.

Regarding UCW Reduction, NGOs agree on the importance of reducing women's UCW as a means to contributing to their economic development, to a life free from violence, and to health. Yet, the most common perception is that reduced care work is the doorway to productive (remunerated) work, and therefore, out of poverty. To achieve these benefits, NGOs work closely with the government in labour-saving initiatives (such as water and electricity infrastructure projects), childcare centres, and income-generating strategies such selling points for agricultural products. These efforts support women's empowerment by expanding their resources and agency capacity, commonly related to income. In addition, these initiatives benefit the fight against violence against women, and the protection of their health.

These initiatives take place in rural communities from a Least Developed Country; an environment that has encouraged a discourse of 'paid work equals development'. This position is consistent with the National Gender Policy, in which the government insists on the need to reduce UCW as a means to increase female participation in the labour market and, consequently, to support Rwanda's economic development. I have denominated this approach 'reduce to produce', and it is a perspective that undoubtedly constitutes a step forward for the economic well-being of women. As my findings reveal, NGOs have successfully increased the income and economic independence of women through income-generating activities. However, the consequences of 'reduce to produce' could be harmful for women's empowerment dimensions and strategic gender needs.

By increasing the workload, development interventions can risk women's time (a resource) for purposes other than those of productive work (or training for productive work) such as rest or leisure. Therefore, women's agency under these conditions is questioned. These types of projects that aim to 'take women out of UCW and put them in the labour market' could solve some of the practical gender needs associated with UCW (e.g., income poverty), but rely on women's "elasticity of time" and therefore, they omit the gender

inequalities associated with the issue of care (Moser, 1993, p. 57). The 'reduce to produce' discourse evokes the connotation of UCW as (only) an obstacle. Relying on this approach could neglect considerations such as the undeniable human need to care (despite advances in infrastructure and poverty alleviation) and even the benefits that women perceive when serving as caretakers.

In terms of UCW Redistribution, NGOs indicate that despite the advances in gender equality, rigid gender roles in Rwanda prevent women and men from equally sharing the care obligation. These organisations create awareness-raising initiatives, and support alternatives such as day care centres that make the community aware of the need to involve various actors in care work. Through this work, NGOs have found that UCW redistribution brings impactful benefits for women, but also for men in the form of improved family relationships, income, and health. These perceived changes show the transformative potential of care both inside and outside households.

The studied NGOs propose a model of care redistribution based on the de-feminisation of UCW. This approach offers a view of empowerment centred in the ideas of *power to* and *power with* that does not only support women's empowerment, but also encourages the transformation of gender relations both in the private and public spheres. These efforts prioritise the involvement of men in care work both for their own benefit and for that of Rwandan society and see UCW as a 'game changer'. However, the NGOs' perception differs from previous government positions that considered redistribution only to the extent that it promoted women's participation in paid employment. This government stance differs from recent UCW theories that conceive empowerment as the involvement of men in traditionally feminised activities such as care work (instead of women in traditionally masculine positions). Besides, it overlooks that in a context like Rwanda (with high levels of poverty and female headed households), redistribution programmes may not be sufficient to support women's empowerment. Hence, and to bring UCW redistribution to all levels of society, NGOs advocate with the government for an alternative definition of empowerment and gender equity. NGOs have gradually managed to influence the government and work hand in hand to promote a model that makes UCW a transforming force for the country's gender equality challenges.

The results of this research show an overview of the issue of unpaid care work as perceived and acted by the selected NGOs in Rwanda. The sample of this research is limited to five NGOs, and though each of these NGOs are distinct, they have common approaches that have been presented in this study. The small-scale and focused nature of this analysis

restricts its generalisability, and its conclusions do not aim to portray the actual situation of women's empowerment in rural Rwanda. Indeed, the most significant limitation of this study is the impossibility to triangulate the information with primary data from the beneficiaries and women themselves. The research objective may have been reached via an ethnographic methodology, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this method was not available. The proposed perspective is relevant as it describes the position of key NGOs, and thus, that of key actors in Rwandan development.

The examination of NGOs' actions and perceptions in line with women's empowerment theories is useful as an analytical exercise to foresee possible consequences of their approaches on gender equality in the specific context. Withal, the close relationship between civil society organisations and the government makes the revision of the Rwandan National Policy necessary for an appropriate analysis. As NGOs' agency is largely determined (both formally and informally) by the state, the convergences and divergences with NGOs can illustrate the challenges and opportunities of the development and gender efforts related to women's unpaid care work. Future research should include, besides the beneficiaries' point of view, a further analysis of the efforts in unpaid care work remuneration and representation taking place in Rwanda with a focus on how these strategies support gender equality. In terms of the theoretical approach, further studies should include considerations regarding masculinities perspectives towards UCW and African feminisms' interpretation of women's empowerment.

Civil society organisations have an important impact on the Rwandan gender equality agenda, and they work with the government to recognise, reduce, and redistribute women's unpaid care work. Traditionally, the Rwandan government has perceived unpaid care work merely as an obstacle for women's involvement in activities that contribute to the country's economic development and growth. NGOs' initiatives are promoting a different understanding that depicts unpaid care work as a potential empowering force for women and men in the path towards a more gender equal society. The interconnected work of NGOs and the government can therefore transform Rwanda's gender equality model, so it responds to contemporary challenges such as supporting women's well-being and eliminating intimate partner violence. The results indicate common approaches by the chosen civil society organisations regarding unpaid care work; first, they consider that UCW Recognition implies perceiving care not (only) as an obstacle but (also) as an empowering force. Second, they promote UCW Reduction strategies that give women access to resources and other opportunities, but that can also create a discourse of 'reduce to produce' that threatens

women's agency. Third, they support UCW Redistribution as a key catalyser of gender equality by supporting women's empowerment and further social changes. The joint work of the NGOs and the government can foster the transformation of Rwanda's gender equality model, so it responds to challenges such as women's empowerment and the elimination of intimate partner violence. This case aims to contribute to academic literature as it revises gender and development (NGOs') interventions, and its considerations around women's empowerment may inspire future development projects that aim to deal with unpaid care work and gender equality. Moreover, by studying Rwanda, this case aims to enrich the academic literature as well as the gender and development interventions from the perspective of a gender equality role model from the Global South. The work undertaken by the selected NGOs in Rwanda show potential transformations that can occur when women's unpaid care work is recognised, reduced, and redistributed; the goal is therefore *caring* to empower.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

<u>**Interview and Observation Guide**</u>

Topic: NGOs' initiatives on Unpaid Care Work in Rwanda

Research Question: What are the outcomes for women's empowerment of NGOs' initiatives regarding women's unpaid domestic work in Rwanda?

1. Interview guide

The following guide aims to support a semi-structured interview with a feminist methodology with an estimated time of one hour.

a. Introductory questions

- Why is it important for your NGO to act upon UCW?
- Which initiatives has your NGO implemented regarding women's unpaid care work?
- How does your organisation understand women's empowerment?

b. Initial open-ended questions

- For how long has the NGO implemented these initiatives?
- What are the main objectives of the initiatives?
- What are your main allies in these initiatives? (international partners; top-down approach?)

c. Intermediate questions

- How exactly do the initiatives support women in recognising, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work?CARE Gender Equality Framework: *change relations.*
    - o "Such *resources* take the form of actual allocations as well as of future claims and expectations" (Kabeer, 1999, p.437)
- Do you think the initiatives can transform women's decision-making power in their daily life? (Kabeer's *agency*; CARE Gender Equality Framework's *build agency*) In what ways?
- Which do you consider are the main outcomes of these initiatives? (Kabber's *achievements* and *empowerment*)
- What are the most important challenges of these initiatives? (both to the organization and the recipients?)

- What are your thoughts on how gender roles affect women's situation when it comes to unpaid work?
  - o Are changes needed?

  (Kabeer's *individual vs. structural change*; CARE Gender Equality Framework's *transform structures*)

d. **Ending questions**

(Kabeer's *individual vs. structural change*; CARE Gender Equality Framework's *transform structures*)

- What is the power that these initiatives have for transforming beneficiaries' lives?
- What is the power that these initiatives have in contributing to gender equality?

2. **Observation guide**

   a. **What is the approach that NGOs are using in addressing unpaid care work?**
      - o Human Rights
      - o Women's Empowerment
      - o Social Justice
      - o Gender Violence
      - o Poverty/ women's poverty
      - o Economic interests
      - o Gender equality

   b. **Do they use language such as…?**
      - o Unpaid Care Work is 'women's job'
      - o "Men have to help out/collaborate"

   c. **Is there any reference to…?**
      - o African values
      - o African feminisms
      - o Critiques to "Western" perspectives
      - o The importance of challenging or working with the government.

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Text

<div align="center">

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

</div>

Title of Project: *Unpaid Domestic Work in Rwanda: NGOs Initiatives towards Gender Equality*

Main Researcher (Student): Carolina Herrera-Cano.

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Supervisor (Project Leader): Elisabeth Molteberg, Assistant professor.

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Institution (data controller): Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). Ås, Norway.

Date: _____

Participant's name: _____

<div align="center">

RESEARCH PROJECT INFORMATION

</div>

We invite you to take part in a research study Unpaid Domestic Work in Rwanda: NGOs Initiatives towards Gender Equality, a Master's in Global Development Studies project for the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) in Ås, Norway. The research will take place from October 2020 to May 2021. This project aims to study the initiatives that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are implementing in Rwanda with the purpose of recognizing, reducing, and redistributing women's unpaid care work. The collected personal information will be used to understand the experiences, opinions, and knowledge the NGOs' representatives and beneficiaries have about the initiatives dealing with women's empowerment and unpaid care work.

Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. You can discuss any questions about this study with the main researcher, and take your time to decide if you would like to participate. If you decide to participate, you must sign this form to show that you want to take part.

    a. **Purpose of the Research**

This research attempts to analyse NGOs' initiatives on women's unpaid care work in Rwanda, as perceived by NGOs' representatives and civil society. The study seeks to analyse the outcomes of these initiatives regarding gender equality in Rwanda.

    b. **Research Procedures**

This project seeks to undertake a qualitative approach about the experiences, opinions, and perceptions of NGOs' representatives and programme beneficiaries. Firstly, the study will examine document information in order to analyse the outcomes of the initiatives on unpaid care work. Second, the main researcher will undertake different personal interviews (that will be conducted on-line) with each voluntary participant, and will collect information on the outcomes of the NGOs' initiatives regarding unpaid care work. Finally, the information will be analysed in light of academic literature on gender equality. The researcher will be processing personal data based on the consent of the data subject, and you will have the right

to request access, correction, deletion, limitation and data portability, by request to the main researcher.

c. Involvement with the Project

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in personal interviews between October 2020 and May 2021. The number of interviews may vary between one and two interviews, based on the needs of the research, and will be previously discussed with the participant. The estimated time of each interview is an hour, but may be longer based on the participants' decision.

d. Statement of Confidentiality

Your information and records that are used, stored, and analysed for this research will be confidential and will only serve academic purposes. Your answers will be anonymised, and any identifiable information will be deleted from the project report. At the end of the project the collected personal data will be anonymised and used for academic purposes.

e. Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason, as long as your personal data are being processed. You can communicate your decision orally or in a written form to the main researcher, and your personal data and information will be immediately deleted. You have the right to send complaints to the Data Protection Officer (Personvernombudet) at the institution responsible for the project (contact: Hanne Pernille Gulbrandsen, phone:+47 40281558, e-mail: personvernombud@nmbu.no) or to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority (Datatilsynet).

f. Signature and Consent

Before making the decision regarding your participation in this research, you should have:

- Discussed this study with the main researcher

- Reviewed the information in this form

- Had the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

This project has been notified to The Data Protection Official for Research at NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS (personvernombudet@nsd.no, +47 55 58 21 17).

Your signature below means that you have received this information, have asked the questions you currently have about the research, and have received answers to those questions. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated form to keep for future reference.

Participant: By signing this consent form, you indicate that you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research.

_____   _____   _____   _____

    Signature of Participant   Date   Time