

## ARTICLE

# The power of narratives: Explaining inaction on gender mainstreaming in Uganda's climate change policy

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## Abstract

**Motivation:** Gender mainstreaming has been increasingly viewed as a fundamental element of agricultural climate adaptation policies. However, the expectation that gender-mainstreaming efforts would contribute towards greater gender equality has been mostly disappointed. Our starting point is this disjuncture between a firm establishment of the gender mainstreaming discourse and the limited visible effects in reducing gender inequalities.

**Purpose:** To understand this disjuncture we examine the meanings through which policy makers relate to, and dis/engage with gender issues. The article draws attention to the role of narratives in micro-processes of policymaking that support, perpetuate or create resistance against the concept of gender mainstreaming, or against policy change more broadly.

**Approach and methods:** The study deploys a multi-step narrative analysis in which we identify story episodes, co-construct stories, identify and interpret the narratives and finally study these narratives in interaction. The empirical material consists of thirty semi-standardized expert interviews as well as excerpts from ten multi-stakeholder meetings on the themes of climate change, agriculture, rural livelihoods and gender in Uganda.

**Findings:** The analysis reveals a complex ecology of 22 stories, clustered in five main narratives. While most stories unfold a Gender Equality narrative, four competing narratives emerge. Shifts during conversations from the Gender Equality narrative to other narratives reveal that the discursive engagement with gender mainstreaming is accompanied by simultaneous resistance, deconstruction and revocation. These narrative shifts exercise four distinct power effects: They (1) shift blame for ineffective gender implementation; (2) legitimize policy inaction; (3) foreground and naturalize patriarchy; and (4) promote the diversion of resources. The implicit communicative strategies exercise power *through* ideas (persuade listeners that the equality narrative is inappropriate), power *over* ideas (gender equality ideas are rejected or frustrated) and power *in* ideas (entrenched patriarchy ideas are reproduced).

**Policy implications:** Attention to ideational power through policy narrative contributes to explain implementation issues with gender mainstreaming in Uganda, and is likely to be relevant beyond this case.

## KEY WORDS

Africa, climate change, gender mainstreaming, ideational power, policy narrative, Uganda

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades the consideration of gender issues in agriculture and climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies has gained momentum in national and international policy-making. Numerous studies have explored how the gendered nature of the impacts of climate change differ within regions, providing evidence that women and men are affected differently by climate change and differ in their adaptive capacity (Bhattarai et al., 2015; Godden, 2013; Jin et al., 2015; Jost et al., 2016). Consequently, gender mainstreaming has increasingly been viewed as a fundamental element of agricultural climate adaptation policies in order to ensure that the distinctive roles, preferences and challenges of men and women are equally considered. However, the expectation that gender-mainstreaming efforts would contribute towards greater gender equality in the realms of agriculture and climate change interventions has been mostly disappointed (Alston, 2014).

This research aims to address a puzzle that Alston (2014) raises: “Why, despite the rapid adoption of gender mainstreaming across the globe, do mainstreaming processes and practices not produce greater gender equality?” Our starting point is the disjuncture between a firm establishment of the gender-mainstreaming discourse in policy and the limited visible effects in terms of reducing gender inequalities (Allwood, 2013; Arora-Jonsson, 2014; Cornwall et al., 2007; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013; Hankivsky, 2005; Meier & Celis, 2011; Mukhopadhyay, 2004). In examining the causes of this apparent disconnection between policy and practice, a great body of research has critically evaluated gender-mainstreaming policies and development programmes, with a focus on identifying structural barriers that inhibit effective implementation (Brouwers, 2013; Bustelo, 2003; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013; Moser, 2005; Moser & Moser, 2005). Considering that many gender programmes are realized at local levels, other researchers argue that to understand this implementation gap we need to examine the meanings and interactive processes through which policy-makers and practitioners relate to, and dis/engage with, gender issues at the local level (Jalušič, 2009; Wittman, 2010). This query resonates with an interpretive perspective on policy processes, which emphasizes the need to understand how policy-makers make sense of novel challenges. This requires listening to the stories they tell and reconstructing the underlying narrative or, in other words, the overall pattern of meaning, the characterization of different actors and groups and the implicit moral (Bevir & Rhodes, 2006; Rhodes, 2011).

Examining how gender issues are narrated in specific policy-making contexts provides insight into the interpretive and strategic processes through which issues are understood, addressed and manoeuvred in practice. Narratives articulate and structure the ideas that are part of the policy context in which a policy issue is understood and enacted (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016; Hay, 2002). Analysing policy narratives therefore helps to understand ideational and discursive power effects. Narratives can serve to exercise power through, over or in ideas (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016), and at all three levels policy narratives will influence how a specific policy issue can or cannot be discussed and addressed. Linking gender policy narratives to ideational or discursive power, this article draws attention to the role of everyday narratives among policy-makers in the micro-processes of policy-making that support, perpetuate or create resistance to the concept of gender mainstreaming, or against policy change more broadly. Using gender mainstreaming in climate change adaptation policy in Uganda as a case study, we address two research questions: (1) Which narratives on gender and local climate change adaptation circulate in policy-making spheres; and (2) What are their ideational power effects?

## 2 | GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY-MAKING

Climate change has widely been recognized as posing a critical threat to rural livelihoods in countries that are highly dependent on agriculture and natural resources. This is the case in Uganda, where climate change has increasingly been identified as a significant threat to the country's economic and social development in key national policies and strategic plans—e.g. 2016–2021 National Development Plan (Republic of Uganda, 2015a), Uganda Vision 2040 (Republic of Uganda, 2013). The Uganda National Climate Change Policy (Republic of Uganda, 2015b) was adopted in 2015 as an attempt to embrace a co-ordinated approach towards this goal. In the agricultural sector, the Climate-Smart Agriculture Country Plan, adopted in 2015, constitutes a key policy document on climate change.

Against this background, gender mainstreaming<sup>1</sup> in climate change discourse has become more salient in recent years. Climate change is expected to exacerbate pre-existing social inequalities, among which gender disparities are considered most prevalent (Aguilar, 2010). Gender also occupies a central position in discourses on climate change mitigation, for example in calls for equitable benefits from REDD+ compensation schemes (UN-REDD, 2013). International organizations advocate that mitigation strategies such as climate-smart agriculture should consider gender issues from the onset (World Bank et al., 2015). Gender considerations have also been at the forefront in international climate change negotiations where quota systems and other efforts are adopted to ensure that women's voices are better represented (UNFCCC, 2001).

Many governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other institutions have also signed up to gender-mainstreaming policies (Moser & Moser, 2005). More specifically, in Uganda many of the agriculture and climate change policies and strategies have integrated gender considerations, although to different degrees (see Ampaire et al., 2019 for a detailed overview). The government has also developed sectoral gender strategies and has established focal gender officers within national ministries. However, implementation of these gender considerations falls short (Acosta et al., 2015; Mukasa et al., 2012; UN Women, 2015). Sharp contrasts between formal gender policy mandates and traditional cultural practices have previously been reported as historically and pervasively constraining any effort towards improved gender equality (Benedetti et al., 2012; Cooper, 2010; Moncrieffe, 2004).

While gender mainstreaming has been an effective strategy to promote the consideration and inclusion of gender issues in policy and programme formulation, not only in climate change arenas but across other policy sectors, radical and transformative change has been rare (Alston, 2014; Brouwers, 2013; van Eerdewijk, 2016; Walby, 2005). According to Alston (2014), the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming has been in part limited because strategies were crafted in international arenas, while the gender mandates have to be implemented in local contexts. Here, the specific cultural and social contexts give rise to variegated interpretations and conceptualizations of gender that are shaped by local norms and background knowledge. Indeed, as Jalušič (2009) points out, it is important to consider how local officials construct their gender meanings and from which contexts and experiences these meanings are emerging. This is particularly important as the institutions entrusted with gender mainstreaming are themselves

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<sup>1</sup>In this article, we refer to gender mainstreaming as “a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated” (ECOSOC, 1997).

gendered, which often creates structural barriers to implementation. For example, through a political ethnography in the Scottish Executive, Wittman (2010) found that, while the organization has an important role in determining practices and policies towards gender in the region, established relations and everyday bureaucratic practices within the organization hampered the success of its gender policies. Attention to the dynamics between interpretations of gender in a local context is therefore important for understanding the conditions for effective and ineffective gender mainstreaming.

In the next section we explain how a focus on the policy stories told among policy-makers can help gain an understanding of the gaps that persist between formally adopted gender considerations in policy and project documents, which are often driven by the requirements of international organizations and donors, and the multifaceted gendered understandings of the policy-making agents in Uganda.

### 3 | CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK—NARRATIVE POLICY ANALYSIS

Narrative policy analysis belongs to the broad range of interpretive approaches to policy analysis. These share an emphasis on the importance of the subjective and multiple experiences of people and their interpretations for the social construction of the meaning of a public policy and the understanding of policy issues (Yanow, 2000). Storytelling is an important part of these processes of meaning-making. Within the broader field of interpretive policy analysis, narrative policy analysis (Fischer, 2003; Roe, 1994; Wagenaar, 2014) therefore examines the processes and strategies through which certain policy understandings are constructed, consolidated, challenged or resisted in a particular policy setting by focusing on the reconstruction of policy stories and their narrative logic.

We understand stories as “symbolic representations of human action in practical, concrete situations. They simultaneously functions [*sic*] as explanation, justification, and instruction [... and make/ past actions understandable while creating the conditions for future action” (Wagenaar, 2014, p. 216). Emerging from people’s perception and understanding of the world, the stories a narrator tells are partly a reflection of a specific cultural ideology, dogma or political understanding that an individual holds at a particular point in time. Studying the background understanding and ideological principles (tenet) from which the stories are generated will facilitate the reconstruction of a narrative pattern. Narrative patterns are the background understanding that create interconnections between multitudes of more confined, specific stories. In this article we use “narrative” as a shorthand formulation for “narrative pattern.”

Importantly, policy contexts are usually characterized by competing interests and agendas, diverging perceptions of problems and differing values. We can expect these to be expressed through stories that are inscribed into different narratives. Roe (1994) suggests that in each policy arena, a dominant policy narrative that justifies and legitimizes the established policy is contested by counter-narratives and/or less well-developed and inconclusive “non-narratives” that express viewpoints and experiences which are excluded from the dominant narrative.

Storytelling is a universal medium that human beings use to communicate how they perceive the world around them. The stories that people share echo their perceptions and understandings of society (Ingram et al., 2019; Lejano et al., 2013; Shenhav, 2015). Stories are used to interpret events in daily life. They are therefore an important medium for the creation and transformation

of the social meanings attached to events, objects and abstract concepts encountered in daily lives:

it is through the act of storytelling that individuals assess their social positions in their respective communities, grasp the goals and values of their social groups and communities, internalize their social conventions, and understand who they are vis-à-vis one another. (Fischer, 2003, p. 162)

Within a specific policy-making context, the study of stories is a way for the policy analyst to understand how certain topics are discussed, communicated and contextualized. Understanding the moral of a story deserves particular attention, as it will implicitly or explicitly convey what should or should not be done with regard to a specific policy issue. The analysis of the stories told offers insights into the dominant and the neglected narrative patterns that are used in policy circles to problematize and justify specific policy interventions (Fischer, 2003; Roe, 1991, 1994).

In policy-making, narratives may exert power through, over or in ideas (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016). Policy actors can use narratives strategically to persuade others, thereby exerting power *through* ideas, or to marginalize and suppress alternative ideas in an attempt to exercise power *over* ideas (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). But narratives can also produce and reproduce implicit knowledge structures, which determine and shape the realm of available subject positions and legitimate ideas. These are instances of power *in* ideas, which are conveyed by the implicit ontologies and epistemologies of policy stories (Lukes, 1974). These different forms of ideational or discursive power can be seen “as pervasively filtering through everyday life through language and practices” (Arora-Jonsson, 2013, p. 21).

Different times, locations and events will create context-specific stories that cannot be extrapolated to other situations. It is the narrative context within which a story is interpreted that will provide the meaning to the story (Fischer, 2003). Conceptualizations of gender and climate change can be rather abstract, obtaining much of their meaning in locally specific contexts and through the stories shared between specific groups of actors. A narrative policy approach therefore aims to capture stories-in-context, or situated stories, either through overhearing everyday conversations or through in-depth interviews which allow participants to explain and reflect their everyday policy-related actions and experiences. By sharing their stories, participants also provide insight to experienced gender relations, local understandings of gender and gender-related norms. A policy analyst will be able to interpret stories only against the background understanding of the narratives in which the story is embedded. However, understanding the narrative requires knowing a range of stories and comprehending their connections. The interpretation of stories and the reconstruction of the relevant narratives is therefore an iterative process, reminiscent of hermeneutic interpretation but without the focus on the speaker's or author's intention. In this sense, it is only through a deep enculturation in the local study context that the policy analyst will be able to validly interpret the emerging stories and narratives (Rhodes, 2011; Wagenaar, 2014).

Within a specific policy issue and context, a multitude of stories is likely to emerge, which will often cluster into several narratives. In this article we refer to this ensemble of stories and narratives as a narrative landscape, using a conceptual metaphor. During the course of a conversation, or within a document, a speaker or author might tell variegated stories that belong to different narratives. We call the instance when the narration shifts from one narrative to another a “narrative shift.” The movements from one to another are analogous to a harmonic shift in a piece of music where the melody (the narration of the speaker) moves into a different context of mood and meaning (a different narrative). We have therefore termed these occurrences narrative shifts: a shift in a speaker's narration that demarcates

a change of tenet in the stories being told. During our analysis, the regular occurrence of such shifts captured our attention. Many interviewees, engaging with the dominant policy narrative most of the time, chipped in stories that apparently followed a very different logic and articulated scepticism and resistance or even effectively revoked the dominant narrative. Therefore, after presenting our findings, we argue that the concept of narrative shifts will not only help us to better understand how policy actors navigate complex narrative landscapes, but also to discover sites of discursive power and resistance.

## 4 | METHODOLOGY

The study deploys a multi-step narrative analysis. The empirical material consists of 30 semi-standardized expert interviews as well as excerpts from 10 multi-stakeholder meetings on the themes of climate change, agriculture, rural livelihoods and gender. The multi-stakeholder meetings were attended by several co-authors between April 2015 and August 2016. The semi-standardized expert interviews were conducted between June and August 2015. They included 16 experts from five Ugandan national ministries and 14 interviews with representatives from development agencies, NGOs and national farmers' associations.

To allow narratives to develop, interview questions were open-ended and broad, offering the interviewees time and freedom to share and elaborate their stories (Roe, 1994; Wagenaar, 2014). The interview questions were aimed to explore how the interviewees were dealing with gender mainstreaming in climate change issues in their day-to-day work. Following prior consent, the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. The multi-stakeholder meetings were also recorded and interventions that made some reference to gender and climate change issues were transcribed.

Since the study aimed to identify and delineate competing narratives that provide meaning to distinct subsets of stories, a multi-step narrative analysis was required, which we explain below. It is worth noting that the analysis of the research data was a highly inductive and iterative process, and thus repetition of these steps was at times necessary.

### 4.1 | Identification of story episodes

The analysis started with an in-depth examination of all available transcripts to identify story episodes, including instances or elements of a story. We selected story episodes as the basic unit of analysis since often full stories—with a beginning, a middle and an end—were not completed, while story episodes were recurring elements in the conversations in our text corpus. A story episode can take multiple forms, for instance, a characterization of actors in a specific setting or an argument representing an unfinished story with a beginning—or setting the topic of the story—and a middle—or setting the plot—but no clearly defined end. Using the data analysis software *Atlas.ti*, the story episodes were coded for different elements (plot, characterization and/or moral). This analytical step produced a total of 709 story episodes. The list of story episodes was repeatedly discussed by the author team and revised where necessary.

### 4.2 | Co-construction of stories

After the story episodes were extracted from the transcripts, the next interpretive step encompassed a process of inductive aggregation of story episodes into stories. First, using the *Atlas.ti* codes, story episodes were grouped together if they communicated the same moral, presented a common set of characters and

characterizations or constituted complementary parts of a common plot. By iteratively reading through the different story episodes, similarities and meaning sharing elements between story episodes were identified. Inductively, similar story episodes were assembled to create, through an iterative process of aggregation, full stories that encompass episodes with shared characters, settings, moral and plot.

In order to increase inter-coder reliability, the coded story episodes and the constructed stories were continuously reviewed by several of the researchers in the team.

### **4.3 | Identification and interpretation of narratives**

The following analytical step entailed a reconstruction of the background understanding and the ideological principles (tenet) from which these stories were generated. Through several rounds of synthesis, stories were grouped into narratives with shared plots and morals, but often different characters and settings. This required developing an in-depth understanding and enculturation in the local context, which in our case entailed a 15-month stay in Uganda by the lead author, and maintaining constant communication with local partners. The identified narratives were then given a title and a brief plot summary. To increase transparency of the aggregation process, selected quotes that were particularly rich and that embodied elements representative of a narrative were included in this article. The aggregation of stories and the delineation and characterization of the various narratives were repeatedly discussed and revised by the team of authors. However, the construction of narratives is an iterative and interpretive process, and we consider narratives ultimately a co-constructive product of the participants' narration and the researchers' reconstruction of story elements and stories.

### **4.4 | Narrative landscape and the study of stories in interaction**

The ensemble of stories and narratives constituted what we call the narrative landscape of our policy context. We conceptualize the narrative landscape as a cartography of the stories found, distributed across bordering regions (the narratives). The analogy of the landscape helped us to visualize how sequences of story elements connect different narratives during the course of an unfolding conversation. The sequence of stories can be pictured as a journey through the regions of the narrative landscape. Crossing the border from one narrative region to another constitutes a narrative shift. Such a narrative shift demarcates a change of the tenet or standpoint from which stories are being told. Comparing the frequency and direction of such shifts across interviews, we were intrigued by the stark differences. We therefore tried to reconstruct the narrative shifts and examine how they were affecting the creation of meaning around the policy issue in question. This implied a move from conceptualizing narratives as isolated ontological entities towards seeing them as a complex interplay, or as narratives in interaction. We were particularly interested in understanding whether the narrative shifts betray tensions between the dominant gender equality narrative and other narratives that expressed scepticism and resistance; and whether these narrative shifts could indicate the exercise of ideational power.

## **5 | MAPPING THE NARRATIVE LANDSCAPE OF GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION IN UGANDA**

Our analysis of the narratives used by Ugandan policy-makers when talking about issues of gender in agriculture under a changing climate found a complex landscape of 22 stories, clustered into five

narratives. For each narrative, we first explain the ideological principles (tenet) from which the stories were being narrated. We then present a table with all stories and story plots that belong to the narrative before providing a more detailed commentary on some of the most insightful stories. At the end of each sub-section an interpretive note explains how and why the presented stories reflected the narrative.

## 5.1 | The gender equality narrative

The core of this narrative is the consideration that all individuals should have the same rights and opportunities in life, regardless of their gender. According to this narrative, women have traditionally been a disadvantaged group in Ugandan society, and thus there is a need to empower women, advocate for their equal rights and defend their interests. Consequently, special programmes and policies should be developed and implemented to ensure that women will no longer be disadvantaged and will benefit equally from public policy.

The Gender Equality narrative was the most frequently used (59% of story episodes). Of the interview partners, 28 out of 30 told stories that contributed to it. It was also prominent during the multi-stakeholder meetings. Half of the stories identified in our text corpus belong to the Gender Equality narrative, underscoring its richness. These 11 stories (Table 1) present a variety of situations in which women are typically portrayed as vulnerable and as victims of climate change (and society). This exposition is linked to a moral plot that calls for support by emphasizing the need to create special programmes that empower women and enhance equality. The exception to this pattern is the story of “*A better woman, a better world*,” in which women are not portrayed as victims but rather as agents of change who capably contribute to the country’s development and to more effective adaptation to and mitigation of climate change, from which their families and communities also benefit.

“The striker’s syndrome” represents a particularly interesting example of a tale generated from this narrative. The story presents women’s limited land ownership as one of the main barriers to women’s empowerment and emancipation. It encapsulates the experience that patriarchal institutions are strong and must be challenged in order to tackle structural constraints, or otherwise the gender gap will persist. The following story episode, told by a male policy-maker in a gender multi-stakeholder meeting, narrates the multiple tasks that women perform in the agricultural fields and at home. Using the metaphor of a football striker, the narrator points to women’s high workload, lack of recognition and marginalization:

*There is a striker’s syndrome [...] where every other person plays on the football pitch but tomorrow the headlines read out one person who scored. The women, on the football pitch, goalkeepers [...], defenders [...], mid-fielders do a lot of work to make sure the deliverables reach where a striker will score. Awards go to strikers. Recognition goes to a striker. However, the people that did all the work for the striker to become relevant on the football pitch are forgotten not only in contribution recognition but even rewards. That is the status women have been condemned to. Men have become strikers, so can’t women be trusted to be strikers? To get out of the garden, get out of the home and go to fetch out and score in the market?*

The striker’s syndrome story portrays women as victims. The story could take a fatalistic turn, but its moral is a call for change: meaningful empowerment of women requires tackling the structural constraints of gender inequality and liberating women from their traditional, disadvantaged position in society.

**TABLE 1** Stories generated from the Gender Equality narrative

<b>Gender Equality Narrative</b>	
<b>Story</b>	<b>Story Plot</b>
The last straw	This is a rescue story about urgency. Ugandan women, who were already among the most vulnerable members of Ugandan society, are disproportionately affected by climate change, which exacerbates their difficult situation. There is an urgent need to act and to consider women in all government efforts, including climate change policies, in order to alleviate their vulnerability.
The lazy woman	This is a tragedy about women who, because of climate change, must walk ever further to fetch water and firewood while the home garden yields also decline. Women work more and more to produce less, and this creates conflicts with their husbands who believe they have become lazy.
The striker's syndrome	This story is a drama recounting how rural women are marginalized: they are expected to work on the family farm but keep none of the profits, they are prevented from inheriting or owning land, and are excluded from household decision-making. The story stresses how structural barriers must be overcome if women are to advance and have their efforts and interests recognized to become, in metaphorical terms, the strikers of a football match.
A better woman, a better world	This is a story of success, a story of women who have been empowered by a development programme. After years of development programmes only benefiting men, the focus on empowering women brings radical change: the empowered women are able to rapidly improve the status of their family, their community and the nation.
Developing gender strategies	This is a commitment story. Due to the paramount importance of considering gender issues in agriculture under a changing climate, special gender strategies are being developed for the sub-sector and gender focal persons are appointed to ensure that gender considerations are at the forefront of sub-sector interventions.
Hearing women's voices	This is an optimistic story about inclusion and representation. Women who had been traditionally excluded from policy-making are now given a voice through affirmative action in every department, council and programme. With this measure, the women are now represented and more equitable and gender-sensitive decisions take place.
Culture, our biggest challenge	This sceptical story presents culture as the biggest hurdle to any changes in gender roles and relations. Strong cultural traditions constrain change in both rural and urban society, where women are discriminated against.
My land, my household, my money	This is a drama about unintended effects. Implementation of gender considerations in agricultural programmes brings certain benefits to women. This disrupts traditional power relations in the household, brings jealousy, and ultimately results in open family conflict, thus representing the failure of gender programmes.
The leadership ladder	This story is a drama about men in higher government positions without interest in pursuing gender mainstreaming. Women, who remain in lower governmental positions, are therefore constrained in their push for gender equality initiatives.
The time-saving technologies	This is a success story in which women, who were already overloaded with work, are now faced with an increased time burden due to the negative effects of climate change. Programmes that introduce time-saving technologies (i.e. improved cooking stoves) liberate women from this burden and they then have more time for themselves and their families.
Patience, it's a slow attitude change	This is a story about prudence and the importance of keeping pace with tradition. Gender issues are increasingly being talked about in agriculture and climate change policy developments but are not yet considered very seriously. The process of considering gender issues is slow since it sometimes clashes with traditional beliefs, but it is on the right track.

Similarly, in “*My land, my household, my money*,” women are victims without clearly personalized culprits. In this story, the woes originate from the climate change and agricultural gender programmes that do not give enough consideration to traditional household roles, which causes the programmes to fail. The male household members are portrayed as secondary miscreants who act out of disappointment. The story communicates the moral that gendered programmes that try to benefit only women might be unsuccessful or even counter-productive. However, the story plot unfolds because men are not ready to accept equal gender relations, which could convey a different moral if this was not naturalized as an unchangeable fact. The following story episode captures the essence of this story:

*He says “this is my money, because this is my land. And yes, you did a project fine, but it is [up to] me to decide what to do with the money.” So there will be tension. You will find a project where livestock is given to the woman [...]. The woman says “It’s my cow, the milk is mine and therefore it is my money.” And the man says, “Yes, it is yours, but the land is mine and I am the head of this household. I need to get the money and see what to do with it.” So it [the project] brings an issue of power and tension in the home. It requires a skill set that is multilevel to be able to pick out those instances at programme level but even at implementation level.*

The common moral or principles encapsulated in these stories convey the need to create special programmes and strategies that reduce gender inequality in the context of a changing climate. This moral points to the Gender Equality narrative as the “generator” of these stories.

## 5.2 | The gender nescience narrative

A second set of stories narrates the insufficient and unclear knowledge about gender issues and the ensuing consequences at different levels and stages of climate change policy-making. The Gender Nescience narrative is embodied in 11% of the stories in our sample (Table 2). We can distinguish two main types of stories within this narrative.

The tale “*They got it all wrong*” highlights the generally insufficient knowledge of gender issues and the ensuing ineffective policy implementation. The “*Game of numbers*” story evolves more specifically around the problem that in many agricultural and climate change programmes, establishing quotas for female participants remains the only proposed “gender activity.” An example is the following story episode:

**TABLE 2** Stories generated from the Gender Nescience narrative

Gender Nescience Narrative	
Story	Story Plot
They got it all wrong	This is an accusatory story. Even as policy-makers window-dress gender as an important aspect to be considered in climate change policy-making, behind the scenes gender is an afterthought, with most policy actors not having a clear idea about what constitutes a gender-sensitive policy. This contributes to ineffective implementation.
Game of numbers	This is a drama about the lack of knowledge that exists regarding gender, which is mostly understood by “number of women included,” and is not properly implemented in either government or NGO climate change programmes. This lack of understanding constrains any advancement in closing the gender gap in agriculture.

*The problem with gender is that it has never been understood. When they say gender, they look at numbers: one two three. “The women are there, so what are you telling me!” they say. People don’t understand gender, there is still need for getting them to understand what gender is, to unpack gender. When I commented on that [policy] draft, it was about numbers, number of women. How do you make people understand gender? It’s not about numbers.*

Noticeably, most of the story episodes originating from the Gender Nescience narrative were told in the third person. This seemed to indicate the narrator’s effort to distance him/herself from the stakeholders who do not understand gender issues. These ignorant organizations and individuals constitute the villains of the story. The victims are women held back from empowerment. The implicit hero is the storyteller, who understands gender and accuses other stakeholders of slowing down gender-sensitive policy formulation and implementation. Both stories emerging from the Gender Nescience narrative share the moral that a better understanding of gender issues is needed.

### 5.3 | The structural inertia narrative

A number of stories converged on stakeholders’ difficulties in complying with gender-mainstreaming guidelines in the face of institutional and political constraints. The Structural Inertia narrative generates stories about a system that is slow to change, the problematic structure within which policy actors operate, and their lack of power within these structures, all of which undermine policy formulation and implementation for gender mainstreaming.

The Structural Inertia narrative generated 12% of the stories in our sample (Table 3). We distinguished four stories.

Within the Structural Inertia narrative, only the “*Counterfeit participation*” story referred to a poor participatory component of the policy-formulation process, while the other stories focused on implementation deficits of gender considerations in agricultural and climate change policies. “*We are at impasse*” is an interesting case of a non-story as the narration offers no clear explanation (conclusion) of how gender indicators and associated budgets would overcome the deadlock.

“*The mainstreaming hoax*” narrates the difficulty that stakeholders face when trying to operationalize gender mainstreaming in the context of climate change, with numerous cross-cutting issues that need to be considered in Ugandan policies. The following story episode gives an account of how puzzling it becomes to mainstream gender in the climate change issue, as the latter is also officially considered to be a cross-cutting issue:

*One major challenge we have is mainstreaming a cross-cutting issue within another cross-cutting issue [Laughs from the audience]. Gender is cross-cutting, climate change is cross-cutting. Now, bringing the two cross-cutting issues [together] is a challenge.*

The fact that mainstreaming seems to stop at the policy-formulation level was also very much present in the narrations, which emphasized that mainstreaming issues are given a very limited budget. This suggests that while gender mainstreaming is largely included in policy documents, in practice it remains a secondary issue:

*Most of the time when we call it mainstreaming it stops at the documentation or programming level, but actual budgeting and costing may not be reflected there. So, when you*

**TABLE 3** Stories generated from the Structural Inertia narrative

Structural Inertia Narrative	
Story	Story Plot
Counterfeit participation	This is a story about frustration. A stakeholder group is asked to participate in a climate change policy consultative process. They do their best to provide input on the policy draft. In the end, they are surprised to see that their views are not incorporated in the policy. The participatory process seems meaningless and counterfeit.
We are at an impasse	This story narrates the deadlock that different stakeholders have reached in considering gender in their projects. Its moral is the importance of developing indicators and associated budgets in the formulation process so that gender mainstreaming can become a reality in the implementation phase.
The mainstreaming hoax	This is a drama that contrasts high ambitions for gender mainstreaming with the lack of operational clarity and insufficient budgets. The drama unfolds when gender has to compete with other mainstreaming issues (e.g. HIV, climate change) for one common budget. Consequently, gender mainstreaming is frustrated in policies and programmes. The moral is clear: unless more resources are allocated to gender mainstreaming, the situation will remain hopeless.
The shelf replete with policies	This is a drama about the deficient implementation of the gender considerations in agricultural and natural resource policies. Uganda is renowned in the region for its advanced gender policies, but the mandates remain largely on paper. If insufficient policy implementation is coupled with insufficient dissemination, the inclusion of gendered considerations in policy documents does not per se create the capability to promote meaningful change.

*integrate, you make it part and parcel so that you benefit from funding from the gender mainstreaming.*

The stories presented here shared a mood of frustration with entrenched administrative and political barriers, which were blamed for ineffective gender formulation and implementation processes.

## 5.4 | The male supremacy narrative

A number of stories convey the moral that men are naturally, and by divine purpose, superior to women and therefore men and women need to be treated accordingly. Any policy intervention needs to respect men and consider them as belonging to a higher social rank than their female counterparts. These stories are generated by what we call a Male Supremacy narrative.

With 8% of the stories on our sample, this was the least frequently used narrative. It was mostly, but not exclusively, told by male narrators. Male Supremacy stories (Table 4) only emerged during interviews in which a certain rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee had previously been created. Their absence during the meetings indicates that they cannot be used in official deliberations. We distinguished three stories:

The story “*They will overthrow us!*” promotes the belief that women’s empowerment should be strictly limited; otherwise the traditional social order will be jeopardized. An underlying but tangible motive is the fear that “too much” female empowerment will challenge or overthrow male supremacy. This is a non-story, since the end or, in other words, what happens when men are overthrown, is not

**TABLE 4** Stories generated from the Male Supremacy narrative

Male Supremacy Narrative	
Story	Story Plot
Run before it's too late	This is a drama about abandonment. As climate change has brought progressively bad fortune to the household, the husband cannot take the situation any longer and decides to abandon the home in search of a better fortune, leaving his wife and family behind. Moral: male behaviour is not to be condemned, men have the agency and freedom to look for a brighter future for themselves.
They will overthrow us!	This is a story about limits. In the centre is a woman who has been economically empowered by the government and NGO programmes. After she starts doing better, the man starts to mistrust her and worries that his superiority might be in jeopardy. Moral: women's empowerment should have limits and never overcome men's superiority.
A woman's place is in the home	This is a drama about control. Empowerment programmes that encourage women to go outside their homes create moral and social decay. Moral: women should be empowered but within their existing gender roles and domestic space.

clearly articulated. The following story episode, told by a manager of an international organization, ponders whether gender issues are too foreign and at odds with eternal divine wisdom:

*Maybe as humanity, we are forcing it because ... biblically from creation, we were given to say that the woman will be submissive to the man but the man should love the woman so it is important that that happens.*

The story "A woman's place is in the home" narrates how women's empowerment is viewed as a potential threat to the current gender power dynamics in the household:

*When the woman becomes more powerful, the other men look at it as a threat. They begin to imagine that the more their women grow, the more their women get income, the more it makes them vulnerable. Therefore they will begin to respond defensively, to make sure that the women are always kept in their place of course, because I think their place is the kitchen.*

The Male Supremacy narrative genuinely and directly challenges the gender equality narrative with its moral that men are, and should be considered to be, superior beings. It presents the proponents of gender mainstreaming as villains who disrupt the social order. Often, the women are presented as misguided and victims. The men are not presented as mere victims since they take counter action. Their responses to female empowerment are not presented as reprehensible, but condoned against the background of tradition and divine revelation.

## 5.5 | The reconciliatory narrative

The Reconciliatory narrative encompasses a number of stories in which gender approaches are reconciled with marriage and family life. Their plots suggest that successful gender interventions must take an inclusive approach that takes not only women but all members of the household into account.

**TABLE 5** Stories generated from the Reconciliatory narrative

Reconciliatory Narrative	
Story	Story Plot
It's all about the family	This is a story about family endurance. Negative effects of climate change for one member of the family are also felt and transmitted to other members of the household. The family needs to adapt as a whole to cope with the negative effects of climate change.
Family, the key for gender success	This is a story about hope. Traditionally, gender programmes have failed due to their lack of inclusion (focusing mostly on women). However, learning from this, there is a bright scenario ahead, where gender programmes consider the family structure and include the men.

Programmes succeed if they approach the main male and female household decision-makers for joint planning.

Of the stories in our sample, 10% belong to the Reconciliatory narrative, which consists of two main stories (Table 5):

The story “*Family, the key for gender success*” promotes the idea that gender and climate change programmes are likely to fail if both spouses are not included from the outset. A joint-spouse approach will thus increase the likelihood of improved outcomes of gender programmes. Women in Development programmes, in which the sole focus is on women, are presented as culpable, with the disappointed women as the victims, while the new, inclusive gender programmes are the heroes of this story. The following episode encapsulates the essence of this story:

*I think one thing we do appreciate, and we have appreciated for long, is that we need men as partners on the journey to gender equality. It is something that in civil society we are continuing to work around, so maybe not a lot of mention was made about men, but we do acknowledge that we need to work with them. We also do acknowledge that many times, because some of these things come with money and power, then it creates power issues within relationships. So it is also about talking to the men about how to deal with some of the power issues that emerge when women become more empowered.*

The Reconciliatory narrative presents itself as a middle ground between the Gender Equality and the Male Supremacy narratives by acknowledging the need for women's empowerment while accepting traditional gender roles and promoting a “family perspective,” which implicitly defines women only in relation to the wellbeing of their family.

## 6 | NARRATIVE SHIFTS: MAPPING NARRATOLOGICAL POWER IN ACTION

The analysis and interpretation of the stories told in the gender and climate change adaptation policy communities in Uganda has revealed a complex narrative landscape in which 22 different stories emerged around five main narratives. Rather than a competition between two or more policy understandings, as commonly found in policy narrative studies (Jones et al., 2014; Roe, 1994), we found a situation with an apparently predominant narrative, the Gender Equality narrative, that was widely used among policy actors, while several other narratives emerged and were used alongside it.

Importantly, during the interviews, stories fitting into the Gender Equality narrative were frequently interspersed with stories that followed a different narrative logic. These narrative shifts were identifiable by a variation in the story setting accompanied by a change in the standpoint from which two consecutive story elements were generated.

Due to the numerous, brief stakeholder interjections and subsequent digressions that take place in multi-stakeholder meetings, the narrative shifts were more easily identifiable during individual conversations with the people we interviewed. An interview setting provides more time to expand and elaborate a narration, so that narrative shifts, should they occur, are more easily traceable.

It is worth noting that even though narrative shifts were identified and examined within the confines of an interview setting with a young, white female conducting the interview, the stories and narrative shifts are likely to reflect a discursive reality beyond the interviews. The narrative shifts that we identified not only open a window to the ways in which policy-makers in Uganda negotiate different understandings of gender. These shifts also hint at the strategic use of narrative that policy-makers employ. It is reasonable to assume that the practice of narrative shifting suggests that the actors navigate complex social realities. Their stories have to link up to multiple overlapping social contexts, for example gender-mainstreaming policies, funders' expectations, norms of professional and social peers, traditional norms and so on. Under such circumstances, a strategic use of storytelling has to be expected. We were particularly interested in shifts from the Gender Equality to other narratives. These shifts create specific semantic effects by placing the dominant Gender Equality narrative in a different context that indicates the intention of the speaker to modify or even invert the meaning of the equality stories. But that context also points to a discursive practice of interlinking gender equality stories with narratives that provide very different plots, actor characterizations and morals.

By identifying and inductively analysing the narrative shifts in our data, we found four different effects of narrative shifts at the level of policy-making. The first two effects were (1) blame-shifting for the ineffective gender implementation; and (2) a legitimization of policy inaction. For example, a recurrent shift from a gender equality discourse to a gender nescience narrative occurs if the narrator starts with the vulnerable situation of Ugandan women in the face of climate change but then shifts the narration to the general lack of understanding of gender issues in the country. The effect of this shift is to question the activating moral of the gender equality narrative, to legitimize the policy lethargy on implementing gender considerations and to shift blame to other stakeholders who do not understand gender issues. These two political effects, blame-shifting and legitimization of policy inaction, were also clearly present in shifts towards structural inertia narratives. Here, flaws in the system, such as an insufficient gender budget, are narrated to justify inaction and shift the blame to the central government and other funding institutions. While it might be difficult to ascertain that these shifts were strategic in nature or just a pure expression of frustration, their narrative logic—in terms of plot and moral—produces a legitimization of policy inaction and blame-shifting in the gender-mainstreaming policy process.

The narrative shift from a gender equality discourse towards a Male Supremacy narrative implied engaging with two completely opposite tenets. For example, the narrator starts with stories about the disadvantaged position of women in society and the need to empower them, and later emphasizes that men are naturally and divinely supposed to be of a higher social rank than their female counterparts, justifying an unequal status quo. This shift had the clear narratological effect of (3) foregrounding and naturalizing patriarchy; and (4) promoting the diversion of resources that were previously allocated to women's programmes by claiming that men should have control over any income entering the household. Shifts from the gender equality to the reconciliatory narrative had similar effects, albeit more subtly. In these instances, the initial equality discourse was diverted towards a "family" approach in which gender programmes would "accept" existing forms of family life and tradition, including the

unequal intra-household power structures. This entails the suggestion that a change of focus from women to households, or families, was needed in all gender and climate change programmes. This shift implied a perpetuation of patriarchy, since the male head of the household would now need to be included and consulted. It also implied a call for the redistribution of resources previously allocated to women to the family as a whole and therefore, as tradition mandates, to the control of the male head of the household.

Attention to narrative shifts allows a better understanding of ideational power in policy discourse. In our data, the discursive effect of the narrative shifts by policy-makers from the Gender Equality narrative to the other narratives works as a widespread, and mostly rather subtle, disempowerment of the equality discourse. The superficial predominance of the Gender Equality narrative was repealed by the iterative use of other narratives that undermined its moral—the need for greater gender equality in climate change adaptation. Through the repeated implicit blame-shifting, the legitimization of gender inaction, the promotion of a diversion of gender resources and the foregrounding of patriarchy, policy-makers achieved a strong disempowering effect in which the ambition of the gender equality discourse was effectively reduced and counteracted.

## 7 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to contribute to the explanation of implementation gaps in gender mainstreaming through the analysis of policy narratives, based on the assumption that policy-makers provide meaning to a complex and unfolding situation through the sharing of policy stories (Fischer, 2003; Roe, 1994). Using the case of climate change policy-making in Uganda, we identified story elements and reconstructed stories and narratives that connect the story elements through a common plot with similar characters and a shared moral.

Our analysis found that a gender equality narrative dominated, but four other narratives provided a variety of alternative understandings of gender mainstreaming in agriculture and climate change. With this study we do not suggest that these are the only stories in policy-making circles in Uganda, but rather they are those we were able to access and reconstruct. We also acknowledge the influence that the presence of a young, white, female researcher could have had on the conversations. Interview partners might have perceived her as closely related to the international donor community, thereby making some narratives more prevalent than others. It is, however, remarkable that even with this methodological caveat we found competitors to the dominant gender equality narrative, suggesting that the latter might be less central in everyday conversations and outside a formal interview setting.

The gender equality narrative identified in Uganda greatly resonates with international standards and treaties that advocate equal opportunity of rights and responsibilities, regardless of gender. Many donors require the adoption of gender-mainstreaming policies. Policy-makers in Uganda therefore have a collective interest in engaging with a gender equality narrative. However, the predominance of this narrative in terms of frequency in our data might not only reflect the demands of the international development community, but also genuine concerns by policy-makers about the detrimental impact of gender inequality on agricultural development and climate change. At the same time, the other narratives were present in almost all interviews, betraying a tension between a superficial acceptance of gender mainstreaming and more sceptical understandings. Many of the frequent shifts from the gender equality narrative, which actors felt they had to engage with, to narratives about structural inertia, male supremacy or the need to focus on families rather than women, revealed frustration and strong reservations towards the dominant narrative. They had immediate discursive effects in questioning

responsibilities, justifying inaction, naturalizing existing patriarchal power structures and promoting the diversion of resources.

Our findings point to a highly distributed exercise of ideational power in gender mainstreaming and development arenas: (1) top-down discourses influence the formulation of policies and programmes in developing countries dependent on foreign aid, such as Uganda; and (2) lateral discourses mould the meaning of gender mainstreaming in the specific national and policy context and tend to limit the transformative effect of gender mainstreaming. These findings partly lend support to Alston's (2014) explanation of the limited success of gender-mainstreaming strategies: while gender mainstreaming had a transnational origin, it is applied within a local context, which imbues it with a variety of interpretations. The findings furthermore demonstrate that discursive power on gender-mainstreaming issues can be seen in everyday life conversations and practices (Arora-Jonsson, 2012).

The stories told by policy-makers construct in this way a double social reality: while apparently engaging and complying with international gender-mainstreaming discourses, the narratives that many policy actors share question the feasibility and sometimes even the desirability of gender mainstreaming. This has implications for ideational power in the sense of Carstensen and Schmidt (2016). First, while the gender equality narrative might look hegemonic in official discourse, the frequent shifting suggests limited persuasive power (power *through* ideas) of this narrative among many policy-makers. Second, many stories reproduce entrenched patriarchal ideas, thereby executing power *in* ideas, for example in the understanding of family roles and dynamics. Third, most stories in the gender ne-science, structural inertia and reconciliatory narratives narrate power *over* ideas when equality ideas are rejected or frustrated. Fourth, the male supremacy narrative is an outright exercise of power *over* ideas in plainly rejecting ideas about gender equality. Consequently, even the inclusion of gender mainstreaming in policy documents is unlikely to exert significant power *in* ideas by effectively structuring the relevant subject positions and actor relations. Certainly there was little evidence that the gender equality narrative had power *over* ideas by silencing alternative views.

These findings suggest that, alongside key structural constraints to gender equality in Uganda, narratives that policy-makers use have their own role to play and are valuable when examining the performance of gender-mainstreaming strategies in climate change policy-making. By delving into how policy-makers relate to gender mainstreaming through the stories they tell, and the tensions that emerge when these stories are studied in interaction, our work has shown the role of ideational power in shaping gender policy processes on the ground, which otherwise would be silenced, overlooked or neglected. Our findings are therefore especially useful for development practitioners working in contexts where the compliance with gender mainstreaming is often assumed as a given and frequently goes unquestioned.

This research has called into question the apparent dominance of gender mainstreaming discourses within governance and development organizations in Uganda by exposing conflicting and more sceptical understandings, which were made visible through storytelling. This resonates with the suggestion by Allwood (2013) that, even when gender appears to be mainstreamed in development policy, unintended consequences arise in part because these policy-making processes are themselves gendered and premised on gendered assumptions. We expect that questioning precisely these gender assumptions—and the micro-processes of resistance to gender mainstreaming—and addressing them through an improved understanding of ideational power can help to make gender mainstreaming more effective in future climate change adaptation and mitigation policy-making processes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was implemented as part of the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), which is carried out with support from CGIAR Fund Donors and through

bilateral funding agreements. For details please visit <https://ccaafs.cgiar.org/donors>. The views expressed in this document cannot be taken to reflect the official opinions of these organizations.

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**How to cite this article:** Acosta M, van Wessel M, van Bommel S, Ampaire EL, Jassogne L, Feindt PH. The power of narratives: Explaining inaction on gender mainstreaming in Uganda's climate change policy. *Dev Policy Rev.* 2020;38:555–574. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12458>