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# Mainstreaming Agency for Women Empowerment in the post- COVID World: Evidence from Malawi

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# Section 1

## Outline

Introduction

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# Introduction

- Globally women comprise 43% of agricultural labor force , 60-80% in least developed countries (UN,2015)
- Women contribute 38%-46 % output (CGIAR,2021)
- Women are a backbone of rural economies (WB, 2008, 2012, Hazell et al., 2010).
- Gender gaps in endowment, agency and economic opportunity outcomes persist across countries (Annan et al., 2021)
- Global gender gap in vulnerabilities, access to resources, and productivity still remain (FAO, 2011; Perez et al., 2015; Quisumbing & Pandolfelli, 2010 Mugege, 2013).



*Photo credit: Reuters*

# Motivation

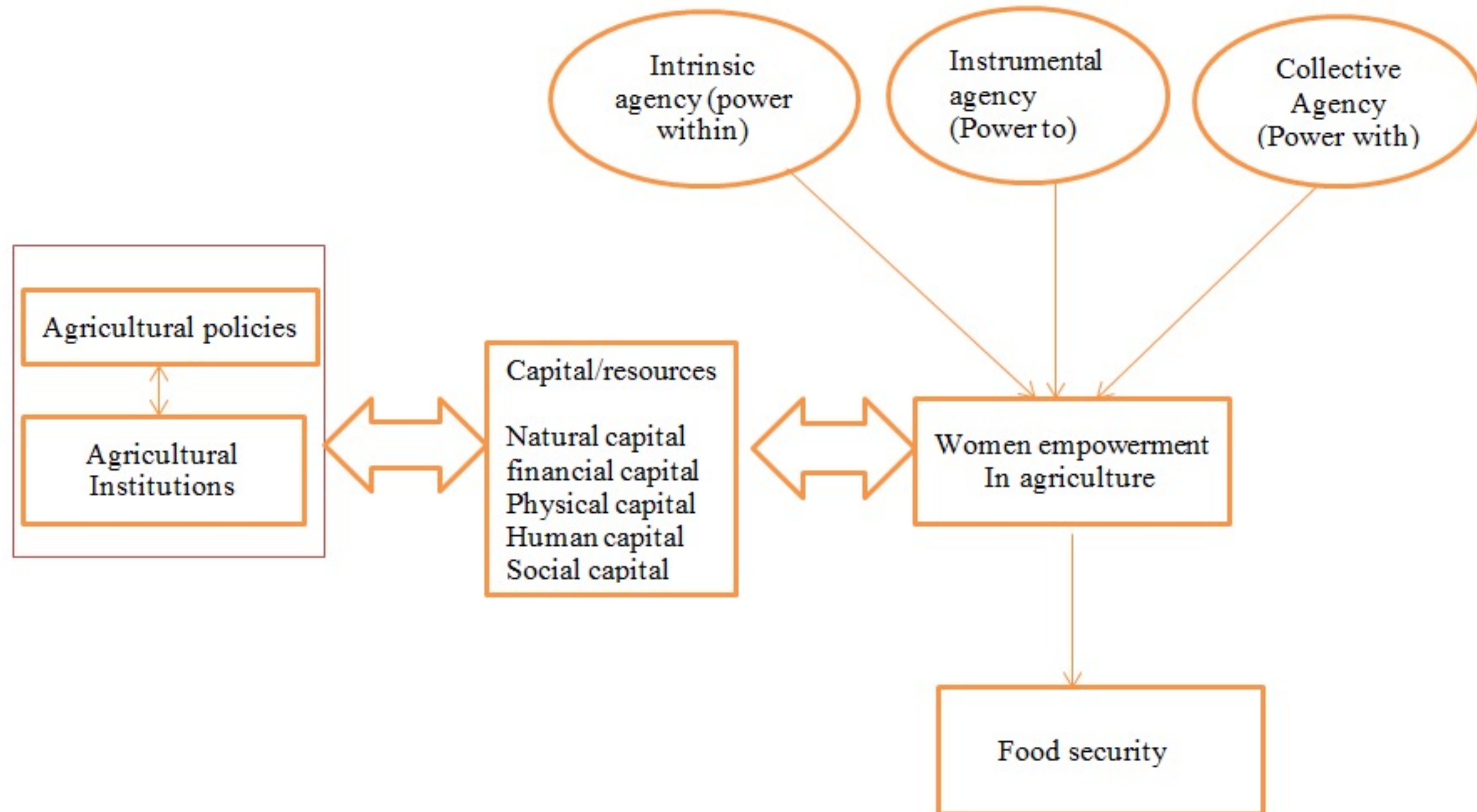
- Gender inequalities in agriculture (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014).
- Underperformance in agriculture (Quisumbing et al., 2014).
- Efforts limited to economic and reproductive resources with no consideration for agency (Alkire et al, 2013)
- COVID-19 pandemic (WB, 2020)
- Need to provide in-depth understanding at the macro level.

# Motivation

## Challenges for women in Agriculture during COVID-19 pandemic

- Even though COVID-19 is said to be the "great equalizer," its impact will not be the same for everyone (Amy et al 2020).
- COVID-19 measures affected women's :
  - Extension services (Alvi et al., 2021)
  - Purchasing power (Ragasa & Lambrecht, 2020, Luckstead et al., 2021)
  - Marketing (Siche & Siche, 2020; Stephens et al., 2020, Aggarwal et al., 2020)
  - Farm labor & escalated domestic roles (Child care and caring for the sick)(WB,2020, Bahn, Cohen, and Rodgers 2020)
- Intensified Domestic Violence (Kabeer, et al,2021)

# Conceptual framework



# Conceptual Framework

## Why agency for empowerment?

- Essential in building resilience
- Empowerment is conceptualized variously as gender equality and can take many forms including:
  - Alleviating the effects of the gender gap (Tornquist and Schmitz, 2009);
  - Enhancing the capacity of poor people to influence the state institutions (World Bank, 2001)
  - Enabling women to organize themselves (Keller & Mbewe, 1991; World Bank, 2012).

# Context

## Study area

Africa



- HDI value of 0.483
- GDI Value of 0.986
- GII Value of 0.565
- MPI Value of 0.243
- GDP per capita \$ 412



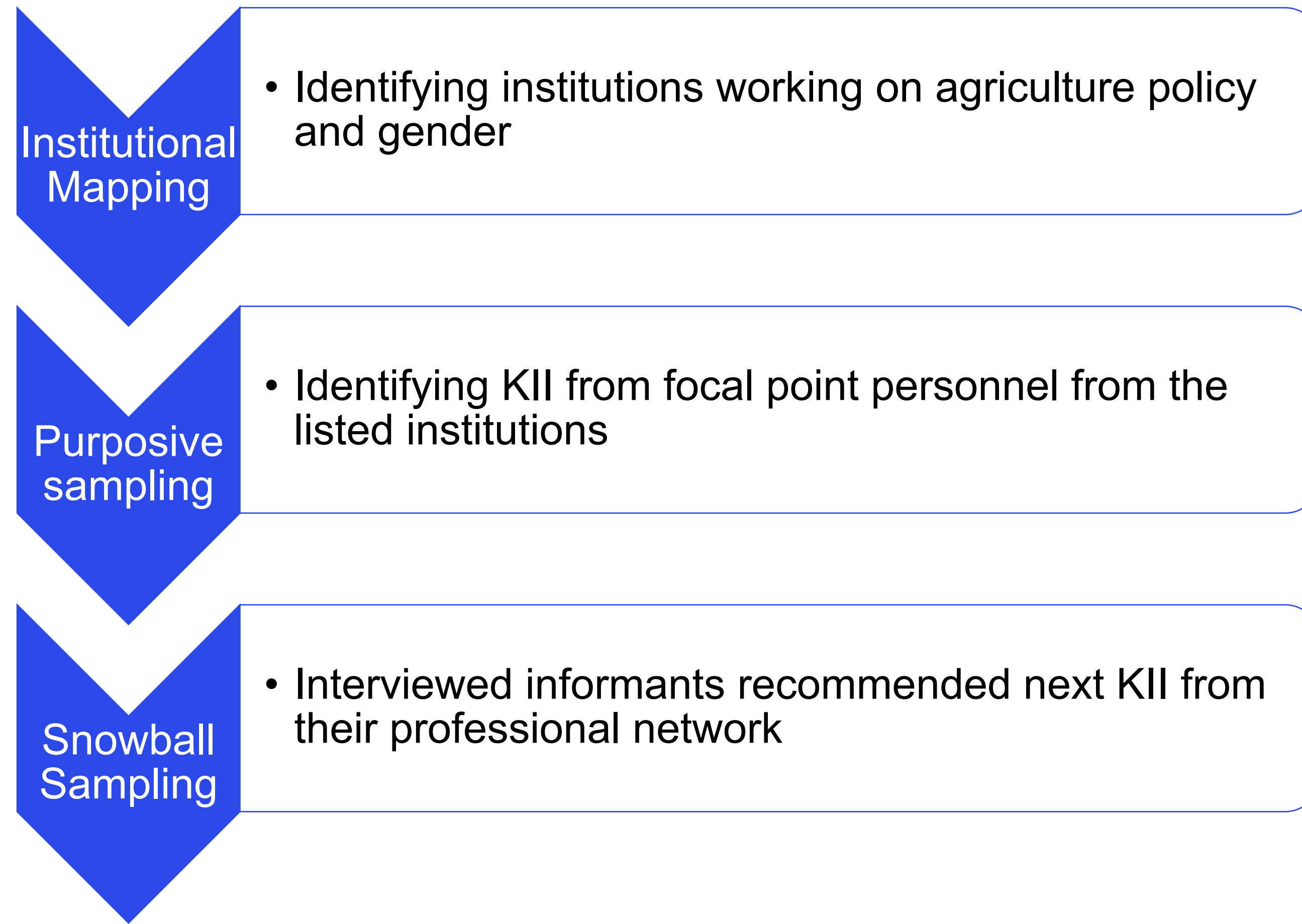
# Context

## Malawi

- Poverty stricken and food insecure (FAO, 2014).
- Climate change impacted (UN, 2015)
- 80% women smallholders (GoM, 2018)
- Unequal social status and roles, high rates of domestic violence, limited control over resources & high workloads (NSO and ICF, 2017).
- Hierarchical, uneven, unresponsive and gendered extension services (Chowa et al., 2013).
- Women are in a particularly vulnerable context in relation to agricultural activities (Bezner Kerr et al., 2016a) & COVID-19 escalates their vulnerability.

# Methods

- Key informant interviews (KII) to collect data
- Thematic coding for analysis

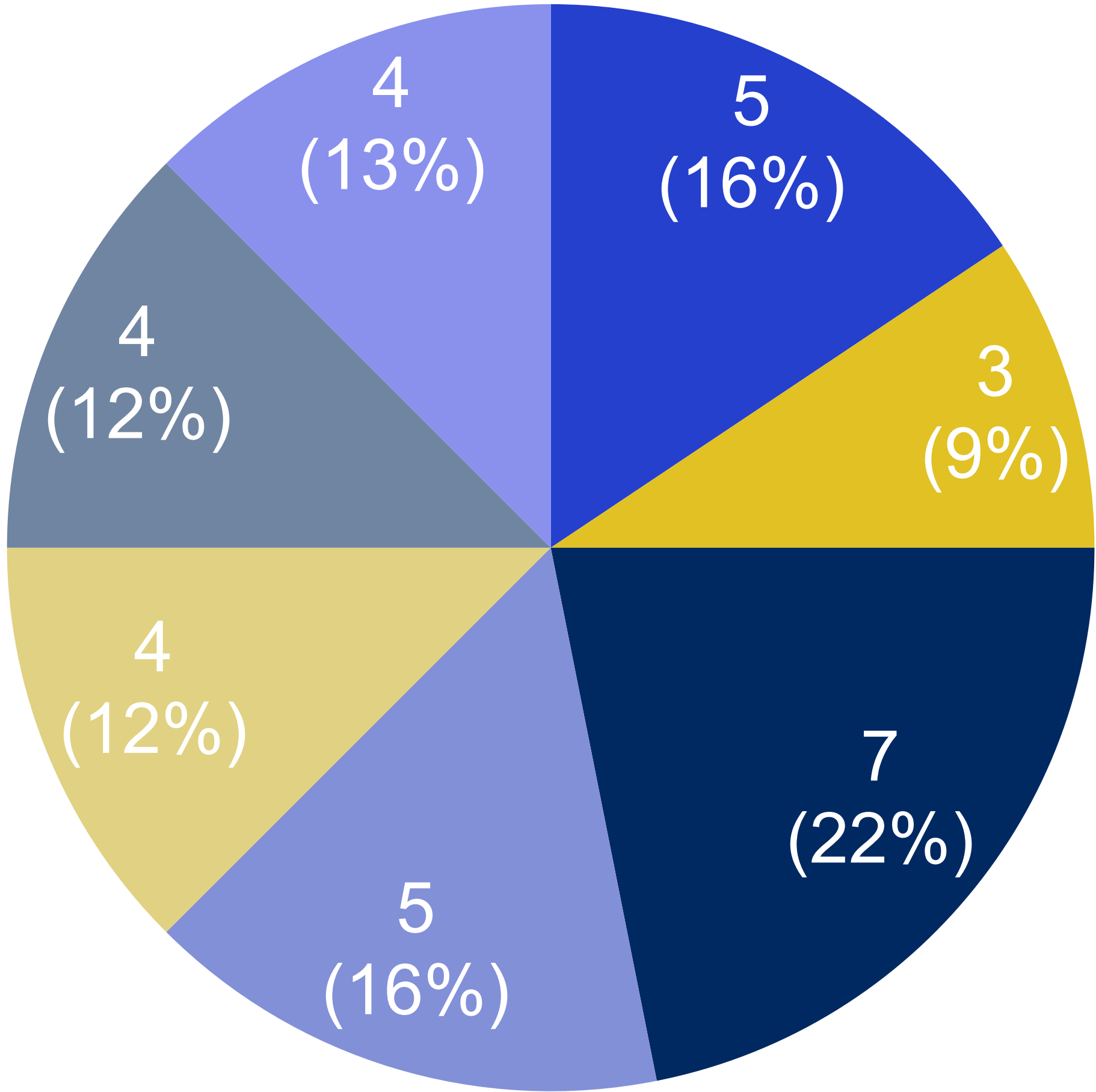


## Methods cont...

N=32		
Sex of KII	Number	Percentage (%)
Male	14	43.75
Female	18	56.25

# Methods cont...

KII



- CSO
- LNGO
- INGO
- Government
- Development partners
- Research
- Private Consultants



# Section 2

## Summary of Findings

- Agricultural institutions and the policy environment
- Women enhanced agency and development
- Gendered impacts of COVID-19 on agriculture



# Agricultural institutions and the policy environment in Malawi

- Institutional & policy fragmentation

*“If we are not very careful as donors, we will end up duplicating efforts in one direction and starve other components of development. Particularly, there are some issues such as gender that are often blinded to prioritization as they usually are considered crosscutting issues. We will see ourselves channeling money that will not fully impact agricultural growth and blame the policy to have failed at the end because we are rushing to act independently...”*

Development partner

## Agricultural institutions and the policy environment in Malawi cont...

- Institutional weaknesses in leadership and gender

*“Unless we have program specific projects that are gender related, otherwise our work is just to work with farmers in general...sometimes we do have gender aspect to fulfill grants needs or secure funding if its specific...”*

Non-Governmental Organisation

# Women enhanced agency and development in agricultural policy

- Lack of gender priorities in policies and gendered strategic interventions to empower women

*“If a project or an intervention does not highlight gender or women empowerment, it is likely going to be chaotic in reaching women. I remember the treadle pump project, it was more or less just generalized as an irrigation project...distributed to farmers, it was user unfriendly to women and it never served the purpose...”*

Government Official

# Women enhanced agency and development in agricultural policy

- Political interference and poor targeting of development projects

*“For example: the farm input subsidy program (FISP) is the most highly funded program in Malawi and is supposed to empower women farmers but the challenge comes in who is targeted, it is not clear that women are beneficiaries as it mention them either as a household head or part of the vulnerable groups. As a result, many of the women farmers do not benefit from the program and we hardly attribute any achievements on their production to the FISP.”*

Researcher

# Gender impacts of COVID-19 on agriculture

- Distorted extension services

*“We definitely knew that extension services would be challenging, We cannot go in their homes and not all of them have mobile phones, even if they had, we have limited funding, to get enough airtime to reach all of them is impossible. Besides some activities need demonstration, how can we demonstrate on phone...”*

Government Official

## Gender impacts of COVID-19 on agriculture cont...

- Interrupted agri-food supply chain and demand for inputs

*“We had no option other than to let agro dealers sell fertilizers. If we kept them long, they have expiry dates. Besides, farmers needed them on time. There is no way they would wait for months before the purchase. Their fields and crops needed it or else they would starve in the following months...However, the sales were not as good because most farmers could no longer afford due to lack of ganyu (Piece work) that would provide them money”*

Government Official

# Gender impacts of COVID-19 on agriculture cont...

- Increased domestic demands on women

*“We have seen busses coming from RSA with returning migrants due to COVID-19; this will mean a cut off on finances for all those that relied on them for survival. We are even worried for others if they will afford to pay for fertilizers or afford food for their families”*

Non-Governmental Organisation

## Gender impacts of COVID-19 on agriculture cont...

- Lack of institutional plan for empowering women

*Honestly, this has left us clueless on how best we can support women farmers. But it has taught us a lot... You know! We don't have to wait for another problem for us to act. It's time we have to immediately plan for emergencies, see even busses do have that big window that says "In case of emergency push this glass (pangozi kankhani galasi) we will work on our policies and budgeting..."*

Non-Governmental Organisation

# Conclusion

- Need for integration of “Bottom-up” approach at political, policy, and decision-making levels.
- Rural women need special needs, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic
- There is need for institutions to review agricultural policies and strategize on innovations that build on effective gendered extension services and resilience
- Agricultural development needs delinking from politics
- COVID-19 impairs progress in achieving SDG's .

# Thank you for listening!

## Questions?

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