

CSOs & WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

How civil society organizations can effectively contribute
to women's empowerment in Dutch policy

Bachelor thesis

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Summary

Civil Society Organizations are important actors in bridging the government to the community. CSOs such as ActionAid, WECF, WO=MEN and WOMEN Inc. are advocating for the needs of women, and are lobbying at different governmental institutions, such as the national government and the United Nations. This research argues that empowering women is not only relevant for developing countries but for developed countries such as the Netherlands as well. Laws and regulations are based on traditional gender roles and stereotypes, therefore negatively influencing the position of Dutch women in society. By interviewing aforementioned CSOs, a light is shed on how CSOs work together in networks to effectively influence governmental institutions by lobbying and advocating for women's rights. Of course, CSOs face certain challenges such as mutual competition, difficulties in changing the public opinion, and competition in receiving funding from the Dutch government. The Dutch government is funding many projects of women's rights organizations and trying to implement Sustainable Development Goal 5 (empowering women and improving gender equality) in a gender-responsive way into their policy. However, this research argues that for the women in their own country they might not do enough to empower them. The answer to the research question of this thesis: *How can Civil Society Organizations effectively contribute to women's empowerment in Dutch policy?* is as follows. Civil Society Organizations are working together with different stakeholders, thereby working more effectively, as they are able to share knowledge and increase visibility of their work to the Dutch government. This way they can influence Dutch policymakers, and therefore policy. Hence, Dutch policy can become more gender inclusive and empower women, as gender inequalities are structurally diminished.

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Introduction

Background

Women are often labelled as the key to future change (ActionAid, 2019c; WECF, 2019a). However, they don't always have the power or tools to create that change. Women are positioned as marginal actors, confined to gender roles (Ugbomeh, 2001) and are therefore sometimes excluded from being the focal point of Civil Society Organizations or non-governmental organizations (Brown, 2016). It could be beneficial to economic and sustainable development to specifically target and engage with women (Duflo, 2012; Ugbomeh, 2001; WGDP, 2019). Several organizations are already focussing on empowering women, as they are aware of women's potential and their key-position in changing the world for the better (ActionAid, 2019c; WGDP, 2019).

Improving gender equality and women's empowerment in the Netherlands can be valuable, as there are still major strides to be made. Examples of the main gender issues in the Netherlands are the wage-difference and the fact that women often do more unpaid work (e.g. household tasks and taking care of children) (WOMEN Inc., 2019b; O'Hagan & Klatzer, 2018; Duflo, 2012). This means that women have more difficulty in being financially independent (Women Inc., 2019b). There's also still an under-representation of women in top-functions on the general labour market and in the political arena (Women Inc., 2019b). Just 11.7% of companies are led by women, and in the Dutch parliament just 35% of the parliamentarians are female (ibid.). What's more is that these kinds of gendered stereotypes about women and their supposed roles still exist and are being confirmed in the media and advertisements (WOMEN Inc., 2019a; WO=MEN, 2019c).

These are important issues that Civil Society Organizations such as ActionAid, Women Engage for a Common Future, Women equals Men and WOMEN Inc. can help in and are solving. They often have a Theory of Change (WO=MEN, 2019c), which entails that they are making long-term strategies with clear and realistic steps to achieve their goals of empowering women. These CSOs work together in networks of organizations and in Public-Private Partnerships to set up different projects to implement Sustainable Development Goal 5 (WECF, 2019b; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2018), about women empowerment and gender equality, into policy. Another big part of their work, which will also be the main focus of this research, is policy influencing. Women's rights organizations in the Netherlands are influencing policymakers by lobbying and advocating for women's empowerment and gender equality at the Dutch government, the European Union and the United Nations (ActionAid, 2019c; WECF, 2019a; WECF, 2019b; WOMEN Inc., 2019c; WOMEN Inc., 2019b; WO=MEN, 2019a). It is important for women to have access to and be included in the public and political debate, otherwise participation processes might not serve their interests (Verloo & Lombardo, 2007). CSOs can facilitate the inclusion of women's needs in these debates by advocating for women on their behalf. How they do this lobbying exactly will be discussed and analysed in this research paper. Furthermore, the challenges that arise for these CSOs by for example working together in these networks and with the government will also be researched and discussed in this paper.

Research problem

This research aims to gain insight into how women's rights organizations can influence policy in a developed country like the Netherlands. These Civil Society Organizations can steer policy into a direction for it to become more gender inclusive or gender equal, by influencing the policymakers. This way women can be more empowered. The main research question will therefore be: *How can Civil Society Organizations effectively contribute to women's empowerment in Dutch policy?*

Hence, it is essential to discuss why it is important to focus on women empowerment in the Netherlands, as most of the time literature and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) focus on empowering women in developing countries. This sub-question will be *Why do we need to empower women in developed countries such as the Netherlands?*

Then the focus will shift towards the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), as these play a major part in empowering women and influencing policy. There are 4 Dutch CSOs that are interviewed for

this research. These organizations, ActionAid, WECF, WO=MEN and Women Inc., are all involved in influencing policymakers to diminish gender inequalities created by stereotypes and gender roles. These organizations are for example working together with different organizations and stakeholders and lobbying to include a gender equality perspective in the Dutch policy making process. Including a focus on gender equality in policies could ensure that women’s interests are taken into account effectively (Verloo & Lombardo, 2007). Reaching their goal, however, might not be as simple as it seems for CSOs. A light will be shed on the challenges these CSOs might face, for example finding a balance in working together with different organizations and the government. The sub-question will be *What is the role of CSOs in empowering women and which challenges do they face?*

Lastly, this research will discuss the role of the Dutch government regarding women’s empowerment. Insight will be provided about how the Dutch government is influenced by CSOs and how they fund women empowerment projects and campaigns. The sub-question *How is the Dutch government doing in terms of empowering women?* will be focussed on gender inclusiveness in Dutch policy.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured as follows. First, the theoretical framework will be discussed. Here the most relevant literature about the main concepts of women empowerment and gender equality, Civil Society Organizations and what CSOs do, will be critically discussed to form the foundation for the rest of the thesis. For this research SDG5, about Women Empowerment and Gender Equality will be the central concept. These concepts and their relations are also shown in Figure 1. Then follows the methodology used for this thesis, which is a qualitative research method by means of semi-structured interviews with 4 CSOs. This is followed by the results. In these results, the main findings from the interviews are explained to get a clear overview of what these CSO do. Then the results will be reviewed on a more critical note in light of the theoretical framework in the Discussion. Lastly, the sub-questions and main research question will be answered in the conclusion.

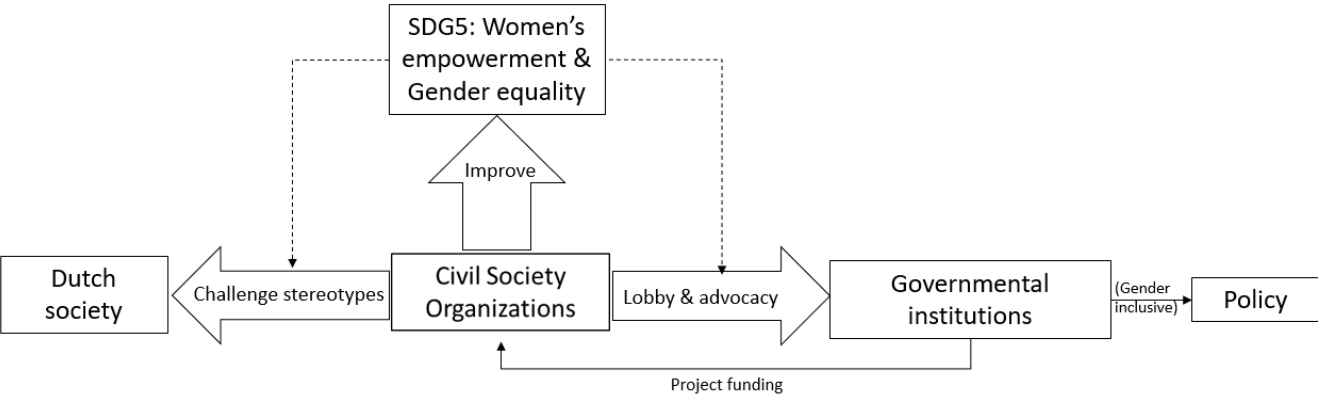


Figure 1: Conceptual Model
Source: Edited by author

Theoretical framework

Women's empowerment is the process in which women are being educated, becoming more independent, gaining more access to resources and overall having more control over their own lives (Duflo, 2012; Ugbomeh, 2001). Additionally, they can become conscious of their rights and self-worth and can now make their own choices on subjects where they couldn't earlier (Duflo, 2012; Ugbomeh, 2001; Kabeer, 1999 via Lebel et al., 2019). When it comes to empowering women in policy, it does not mean that there should be separate policies, but that there should be a specific focus on women in the existing and new policy (Buvinić, 2008).

Women empowerment and the concept of gender equality are heavily interlinked and mutually reinforcing (Onditi & Ondera, 2017). Therefore it can be defined as both the means and end in a process such as sustainable development (ibid.). As Sen (1999) for example argues, the most important feature of sustainability is that people are free to choose their own values and goals, in other words, having their own decisional power. This means that not only women should be empowered, but all genders should. Lombardo & Meier (2006) subscribe to this idea of gender equality, which entails that women should not be subordinated to men and it might be important to mainstream all gender equality and diminish differences as a whole (Lombardo & Meier, 2006; Verloo & Lombardo, 2007). This way, women empowerment and gender equality are important in the process of women gaining more confidence, and thereby taking on leadership roles and changing the current (power)structures (Lebel et al., 2019; Ugbomeh, 2001). Structural changes includes women in decision-making processes and this helps to improve gender equality in the long-run (Ugbomeh, 2001).

These concepts all come together in Sustainable Development Goal 5. SDG5 is about achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, giving them equal opportunities and involving them in decision-making processes (United Nations, 2019b). The 17 SDGs are developed by the United Nations to aim for a better, more sustainable future (United Nations, 2019a). However, there are some points of critique on the SDGs. The main critique is that the SDGs are too broad to implement on the global level (Georgeson & Maslin, 2018; Selin, 2015). Developed countries such as the Netherlands, are often further in implementing policies on sustainable development, whereas developing countries might still have a long way to go (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). In the voluntary reviews at the annual High Level Political Forum (HLPF) discussing the SDG implementation into national policy, the emphasis was put on 'Leaving No One Behind' (Georgeson & Maslin, 2018; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2018). This means that governments and organizations from developed countries will be expected to help other countries achieve the SDGs (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). Another point of critique is the fact that governments are focussing (too much) on the economic benefits and growth that the SDGs are bringing, and not necessarily focussing on fixing the ecological and social issues (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). However, according to Frantz (2017), this might be necessary to get the business world involved in reaching the SDGs. It is important, especially for developed countries, to understand that it's possible and important to make "sustainable business plan[s] that minimizes the impact on the environment and [still] maximize[s] equality and prosperity" (Frantz, 2017)*.

Interestingly, both the articles of Georgeson & Maslin (2018) and Gupta & Vegelin (2016) argue that Civil Society Organizations play an important role in influencing and monitoring national governments' implementation of the SDGs. Moreover, CSOs are the bridge between the local community and the government (Lebel et al., 2019; Rosilawati et al., 2018). CSOs goals are to aid the target community (Brown, 2016), by for example setting up programs or a training that are specifically designed to empower women (Lebel et al, 2019; Krawczyk, 2018; ActionAid, 2019c; WECF, 2019b). These women's rights organizations can also strengthen governance and protect civil

*In Huffington Post: The Business Case for the Sustainable Development Goals

and political rights by advocating the needs of women, such as a gender equality perspective in policy (FRA, 2017; Krawczyk, 2018; Mundkur & Shepherd, 2018; WO=MEN, 2019b). But to play this important role EU institutions and/or the governments should support and facilitate the work of CSOs, and not restrict them (Appe, 2017; FRA, 2017; Mundkur & Shepherd, 2018; Rosilawati et al., 2018).

What is also important for the work of CSOs, is that they work together in networks or coalitions (Appe, 2017; WECF, 2019a). This is also for CSOs working on women empowerment and gender equality, or shortly said SDG5. These networks should not only consist of women organizations, but there needs to be engagement with different kinds of actors, including researchers, social movements, and the policymakers (O'Hagan & Klatzer, 2018; Addabbo et al., 2018). According to Appe (2017), networks can “facilitate discussion and debate, to reach common understandings and strategies, and to manifest collective action” (pp 128). Working together in these kinds of networks can increase the effectiveness of CSOs' work, as knowledge is shared, visibility of their work is increased, and capacity building is enhanced (Appe, 2017; Lebel et al., 2019). It also strengthens civil societies' representativeness character (Albareda, 2018). Their combined experience and their 'obligation' for accountability also make them more effective than for example a government-led project (Krawczyk, 2018; Piewitt et al., 2010).

These networks bring together the right knowledge and capacity to influence policy, and foster more women empowerment and gender equality. To effectively empower women through policy, it's important to change the existing power structures in a systematic way (Lombardo & Meier, 2006; Lebel et al., 2019). A non-technocratic solution is necessary, meaning that the 'add women and stir'-principle is not a sustainable solution for gender equality and empowering women (Tadros, 2010; O'Hagan & Klatzer, 2018). To change these existing power structures in the Netherlands, a first step could be to challenge the cultural patterns and traditions, thereby diminishing the existing stereotypes about women and role division (e.g. women as prime caretakers) (Lombardo & Meier, 2006; Székely, 2008). This way, people might become more open to the idea of gender equality and will want to make an effort to diminish gender inequalities such as the wage gap and the equal distribution of care tasks (O'Hagan & Klatzer, 2018). To effectively change policy to be more gender inclusive, CSOs in the Netherlands could for example lobby at the government for gender mainstreaming by including, for example, a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) or focussing on Gender Budgeting (Lebel et al., 2019; O'Hagan & Klatzer, 2018).

However, according to Albareda (2018) the main problem with networks is that reacting quickly to new developments or changes is difficult. Because when working together with others, the CSO lose some of their autonomy, in the sense that immediate and effective response to changing policy demands is almost impossible (ibid.). Another difficulty for CSOs and their networks is receiving funds from donors. Krawczyk (2018) mentions two types of funding: supply-led and demand-led. Funds are often supply-led, which means the goals have been set by the donors and the CSOs are just the implementors. Therefore, it might be difficult for CSOs to tailor their programs to the specific needs of the target community (Appe, 2017; Brown, 2016; Krawczyk, 2018). The networks need to find a balance in working with their donors and figure out how to effectively use their funding within the given framework (Appe, 2017; Brown, 2016; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2018). Finding a balance in all their relationships with their stakeholders is important for CSOs to be able to play a role in protecting human rights, sustaining good governance and creating overall fitting and accountable projects (Puljek-Shank, 2018; Krawczyk, 2018).

Methodology

This research will consist of two parts. The first part consists of a literature study, described in the theoretical framework, where the different concepts are analysed and critically discussed to answer the related sub-questions. The second part consists of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) with several CSOs that occupy themselves with empowering women. The most important findings from the research will be compared to the literature from the theoretical framework, to see what falls in line with existing theories and what might be new information.

The CSOs that were approached for this research are ActionAid, Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), Women Equals Men (WO=MEN) and WOMEN Inc. These are all organizations focused on women and all have an office in the Netherlands. Except for WOMEN Inc., these organizations were found online, while searching for CSOs in the Netherlands with a focus on women empowerment and sustainable development. WOMEN Inc. was recommended during the interview with WO=MEN and was contacted later.

These organizations were contacted by e-mail, first using the general information e-mail address listed on the websites. The e-mail shortly explained the research and its key concepts, and how and why the CSOs could provide more insights for the research by means of an interview. Almost all of these organizations worked together in networks, had projects on women empowerment and were also influencing policymakers (on different levels), therefore they fit this research.

WO=MEN and WOMEN Inc. responded with an e-mail from one of the interested employees. For ActionAid and WECF specific employees were e-mailed, Rachel and Audrey respectively, working on women's rights projects. With each person, multiple e-mails were sent to set a date for the interview.

The interviews with Roos from WO=MEN and Suzan from WOMEN Inc. were conducted over the phone. The interviews with Rachel and Audrey were conducted face to face in or close by their offices. Some relevant information about the interviewees and their organizations is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Information about the organizations and interviewees

Organization	ActionAid (Nederland)	WECF	WO=MEN	WOMEN Inc.
Interviewee	Rachel	Audrey	Roos	Suzan
Function	Women's rights campaigner	Women2030 Project Coordinator	Program Manager Sustainable Economic Development	Senior Editor
Office Location	Amsterdam	Utrecht	Den Haag	Amsterdam
Yearly income*	€ 3,551,125	€ 1,770,745	€ 613.973	€ 1,765,633

Source: Edited by author

*Please note that these incomes do not include received funds for specific projects done in alliances such as Women2030 (WECF) or Alliantie Gezondheidszorg op Maat (WOMEN Inc.) as these are often running for multiple years.

On a more critical note, the approached CSOs are all working on women's rights, which makes them relevant to this research. However, as the research topic and aim have shifted from sustainable development towards policy influencing in the Netherlands, the two internationally focussed CSOs ActionAid and WECF might have been less suitable organizations to this research in regards to their focus on Dutch women. However, given that they do work in networks and try to influence policy mostly on UN-level, though much less in the Netherlands, the interviews do have a useful contribution to this research in that sense. Furthermore, it is striking that all four organizations' offices are located in the Randstad (see figure 2), which is the economic and political centre of the Netherlands (CBS, 2014; OECD, 2007). This has mostly to do with the fact that these organizations are quite big players on women empowerment and gender equality in the Netherlands,

and will often have the means to have an office in an accessible city. Additionally, it's useful to be in geographical proximity to relevant stakeholders such as governmental institutions (The Hague), many offices and corporations (often located in the cities in the Randstad, such as Amsterdam, Utrecht or Rotterdam), or media-corporations (Hilversum, close to Utrecht; in the Randstad area) as information and communication can happen quickly (Damian & Zowghi, 2002).

Figure 2: Office locations of interviewed Civil Society Organizations



An ethical way of interviewing

Interviews are a prominent way of data collection in qualitative research, as it helps to show people’s perceptions and definitions of situations (Punch, 2014). This way of data-collection will give insight into CSOs, how they work, and what challenges they may come across. It is important to conduct an ethical research, to protect the rights of the people involved and affected by this research, and follow the three principles of ethical behaviour: justice, beneficence, and respect (Hay, 2016). As this research includes insights into Civil Society Organizations by means of a literature study but also conducting interviews, there are several ethical considerations. First of all, the interviewee will be presented with an informed consent form (see Appendix A). On this form, the interviewee will be informed about the research and its purposes, and about her rights, such as the possibility to withdraw from the research and refusing to answer a question. This will also make sure the interviewee will not be caused any harm.

This research focuses on CSOs and governance, which might create friction between the interviewee and the researcher, as the researcher is interested in the difficulties and dilemmas that arise for those organizations. Because the researcher is an outsider to the organization, the organization and interviewee might not want to answer questions about their internal problems. It is therefore important that the researcher makes the interviewee feel completely comfortable during the interview, and that he or she is aware of the fact that the research is only for educational purposes. This will be done by shortly introducing oneself and the interview’s purpose, and by mentioning and giving the informed consent form. This will hopefully provide interesting information to gain new insights that will be useful for this research.

Results

Here, the information collected during the four interviews with ActionAid, WECF, WO=MEN and WOMEN Inc., will be given, discussed, and compared to each other. This will give a better insight into what these CSOs exactly do, how they work together and how they influence policymakers on different levels, although the main focus is on the Dutch context. In the discussion, this information will be discussed more in-depth in light of the theoretical framework.

The organizations

ActionAid is an organization that focuses on diminishing worldwide poverty and inequality with a specific focus on women's rights. They are an international organization with offices in many different countries (see Figure 3). In these (mostly developing) countries they work on four different themes: women's rights, climate, civic space, and emergency aid. In the Netherlands they mainly want to change Dutch policy and the public opinion on poverty and inequality in developing countries, to create a structural way to diminish these problems worldwide.

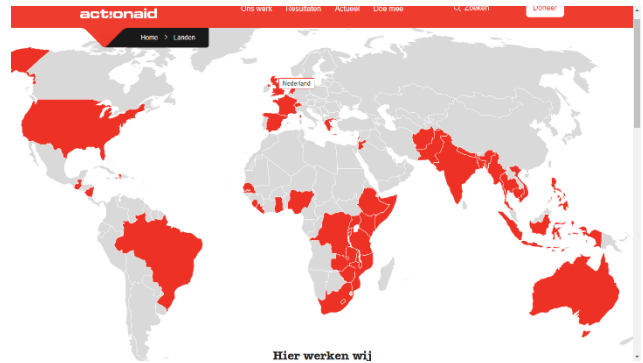


Figure 3: map of ActionAid offices.
Red indicates the office location
Source: <https://actionaid.nl/landen/>



Figure 4: map of WECF offices
Green indicates the office location
Source: <https://www.wecf.org/our-partners/>

Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) is an ecofeminist organization, which means they work on sustainable development and environmental health with a specific focus on women and gender. Like ActionAid, they work with a lot of (local) member organizations (150) in about 50 countries worldwide (see Figure 4). Their main program is Women2030 for which they received about 6.5 million euros from the European Commission (European Commission, 2017). They work together with women organizations around the world that work on implementing the different SDGs in their national policies.

Women Equals Men (WO=MEN) is a Dutch Gender Platform which coordinates the Dutch implementation of SDG5 in national and international policy. Many organizations (CSOs, think tanks, unions) are a member of WO=MEN. The organization has three different themes*: Gender, Peace and Safety, Sustainable Economic Development (also in developing countries) and Political Lobby. Within these themes, they work on different strategies to gain knowledge, also working together with other organizations, to influence political institutions at different levels. They work with a Theory of Change, which is a long term strategy with clear steps to reach their goals. These clear steps are changing people's opinions and attitudes, defining what means are needed, and how and in what form policies should be changed (WO=MEN, 2019c).

*During the research process, WO=MEN made some changes in their work. Their current themes are: Gender, peace and safety; Sustainable economy and gender, and Sustainable support for gender equality and women's rights.

Lastly, WOMEN Inc. is a Dutch organization that tries to increase the opportunities of Dutch women on the themes Money, Health and Perception/Imaging (Beeldvorming in Dutch). They work on different projects fitting within these themes, in networks of CSOs, research institutes, and media-parties just to name a few. This way they are trying to put Dutch gender issues on the public and political agenda, for example by making easily understandable public campaigns about these issues. They also organize regional/local projects for Dutch women, such as AanTafel, where groups of women can exchange stories and advice with each other.

How these organizations work: networks, funding, and projects

As can be seen from the organizational information, these organizations work together in different networks or alliances. These networks are set up to work on specific projects that often last 2 to 5 years, and require intensive cooperation to reach the goal of that project. In the interviews was mentioned that these projects are often funded by the Dutch government. ActionAid and WO=MEN's projects, which are (mainly) focused on improving (policy) conditions for developing countries are funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Developmental Cooperation. The latter being a part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Recently, it has set up the SDG-Partnership facility, which is a framework to facilitate Public-Private Partnerships to finance developmental projects to help achieve some of the SDGs (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2018). With this framework, they encourage working together in networks, as they limit themselves to funding a maximum of 25 projects. WECF's main project Women2030 is sponsored by the European Commission, and by several national (non-Dutch) governments of the project members. WOMEN Inc.'s projects mainly get financed by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. This is fairly logical as these projects of WOMEN Inc. with other Dutch women's organizations or media-parties focus on creating more knowledge and raising awareness at the government and the public about gender issues in the Netherlands (WOMENINC, 2019d).

WOMEN Inc. has projects that are focussed on the Dutch context. One of their themes is 'Money' where they try to strengthen the position of Dutch women on the labour market. According to Suzan, they do this by raising awareness that the position of women on the labour market is often caused by the existing laws, regulations and social security and the existing role-division. Therefore, WOMEN Inc. gives workshops to employers on how and why to create inclusive workplaces. Furthermore they also create light-toned campaigns about these problems, such as Figure 5 about the wage gap. They give additional information on their website about reasons the wage gap exists, for example because of the short paternity leave which forces women to spend more time taking care of the children. This means that they have less time to work (fulltime) and earn less money. Therefore, WOMEN Inc. also does political lobby, where they try to lobby for a longer paternity leave, to create a change in the stereotypical role-division of the household.

WOMEN Inc. and WO=MEN are also working together in the *Alliantie Samen Werkt Het!* (Alliance Together It Works!), which is also focused on diminishing stereotypes and improving gender equality on the labour market. In this project, but also in other work WO=MEN is doing, they form the link between the Dutch national agenda and the international agenda of the UN and the EU. They are keeping track of the developments on the UN and EU level and try to influence policymakers there to create improvements on the Dutch national level.

And finally, ActionAid, WECF and WO=MEN are all part of the Building Change Initiative where they set up the 'Adopt an SDG' campaign. With this program, Dutch national parliamentarians of all political parties can 'adopt' an SDG, to make themselves strong for this SDG and its



Figure 5: Wage Gap campaign by WomenInc.
Translated: Where is my €300.000?
Source: <https://www.womeninc.nl/geld/>

implementation in a new policy. Organizations that are part of the initiative can contribute their knowledge and advice to the parliamentarians. This way, the SDGs are tried to be made relevant in the Netherlands.

Lobby and advocacy

What came forward in the interviews was that the goal of all of these CSOs is to fix gender issues in a structural way, which often involves, as mentioned above, capacity building and advocacy and lobbying at different levels of political institutions. Lobbying and advocating women's rights and needs is something that all interviewed organizations do. The interviewees mentioned that they often do this in networks by writing letters to politicians. Such a letter contains academically substantiated policy recommendations, which is supported by multiple organizations contributing to this letter. According to the interviewees, this is an effective way of working as it increases the visibility of the letter, and it's useful to be able to divide the tasks. Also, such a letter carries a certain weight as it combines knowledge and support of multiple CSOs, already coordinated towards a common goal. These recommendations in the letter then need to find a majority, for which lobbying is needed. It can take a lot of lobbying and time before the issue will be on the political agenda. If the topic is finally debated, it's only to hope that other people agree as well. If that's the case, then the CSO is sometimes included in the policy design process. It's useful to link these recommendations to the current political debates as they will then be talked about during General Discussions and they are more likely to be implemented in some form.

On the United Nations level, there's also a lot of lobbying and advocating. The UN is the place where many agreements are made and these need monitoring. This monitoring is done by CSOs, and ActionAid, WECF and WO=MEN are actively working at this level. They are writing so-called shadow-reports, in which they analyse and address the gaps in the National Voluntary Reviews published by the national governments (Women2030, 2019). These reports keep track of what the Netherlands is doing in terms of implementing SDGs, and in this case SDG5, into their national policy. Then, during the High Level Political Forum, these CSOs are in the position to critique the Dutch delegacy and thereby influencing Dutch policymakers to improve on women empowerment and gender inclusive policy. Another place for CSOs to influence the Dutch government through the UN is at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). At the CSW the agreements made in Beijing in 1995 on women empowerment and gender equality are protected (by civil society), so women's, LGBT's and sexual and reproductive health rights are safeguarded worldwide (NVR, 2019).

Challenges according to the interviewees

A main challenge of working in networks, according to the interviewees, is the fact that there is some subliminal competition between organizations to be the most visible when publishing (successful) results. Being visible with a successful track record is important when trying to attract funding from for example the Dutch government. Also, coordinating the (main) message of these kind of letters can be difficult, as every organization has its own identity and interests. Their own organization is often at the first place and the coalition/network comes after. This can create tension between organizations. Furthermore, this also makes it difficult to react quickly to new information or debates. Because many women's organizations are participatory, decisions need to be taken by the whole group which takes more time than making decisions within your own organization. However, the interviewees also mentioned that as a single (small) organization it's impossible to be everywhere at once, as they simply don't have the capacity. This is also a big reason for working together with other CSOs in alliances or have these networks.

Another challenge raised by the interviewees was about the public opinion. According to Roos of WO=MEN, she believes that the feminist wave in society is an important aspect of improving gender equality. According to her, women have more intrinsic motivation to solve (their) problems, as they realize they are part of the solution. Rachel of ActionAid agrees with this statement. However, although the public opinion is improving on these issues, there is still (a lot of)

critique and denial on empowerment campaigns from WOMEN Inc.. Even though these negative opinions are often unsubstantiated, they are often that what keeps resonating with the general public, according to Suzan. This can be difficult for the CSOs to deal with, as it can be quite frustrating to work through the ignorance people have towards gender issues.

Finally, a challenge mentioned by Audrey of WECF is the fact that receiving funding as a women's rights organization is becoming more difficult. She said: *"some bigger organization that is not necessarily focused on gender or are not gender-based gets money for gender projects or projects that include gender-mainstreaming. But it creates competition, but it's not, I mean it's great of course to have these kind of projects, but the best of course is to have projects led by feminist organizations and women's rights organizations."* According to Audrey, feminist organizations have a more participatory way of working and have more specific knowledge about women's empowerment and gender equality. Their expertise should make them a better fit for receiving funding on gender-based projects instead of big organizations with a small focus on gender-mainstreaming.

Discussion

Here the information provided in the results will be analysed more in-depth and related to the theoretical framework.

Women empowerment and gender equality projects

To improve women's empowerment and gender equality in the Netherlands, the interviewed CSOs are setting up projects and campaigns to diminish existing gendered stereotypes in society. Furthermore, they are researching to make policy recommendations that are gender inclusive and are lobbying at the Dutch government to implement these recommendations. They do not necessarily want to create separate policies for women, but they want to make sure that policy is empowering women and limit (unnecessary) negative effects (Buvinic, 2008). This way they try to make structural changes (Lebel et al., 2019) and improve the position of women on the labour market and in other aspects such as health care (Duflo, 2012; Ugbomeh, 2001).

What is notable here is that some of the organizations mentioned that they work from the idea of intersectionality. This means they want to challenge inequalities in power that are not only based on gender, but also things like ethnicity and age. These factors are all important in creating unequal situations for an individual. Therefore these organizations believe that all inequalities and differences between people should be diminished so that not only women but everyone can be empowered (Lombardo & Meier, 2006; Verloo & Lombardo, 2007; WO=MEN, 2019b).

Especially WOMEN Inc. is an important player in empowering Dutch women, as the other three organizations are more focussed on empowering women in developing countries or improving conditions for those women. WOMEN Inc. is the only organization of the four to have (regional) projects and campaigns specifically empowering Dutch women. One could say that they are one of the few organizations acknowledging gender issues and thus the need for women empowerment in the Netherlands. They are trying to challenge the underlying problem of gender inequality, to create a sustainable solution for gender equality and women empowerment (O'Hagan & Klatzer, 2018). They try to do this by raising awareness about people's existing stereotypes about gender and gender roles (Lombardo & Meier, 2006; O'Hagan & Klatzer, 2018; Székely, 2008). However, to what extent these campaigns actually diminish people's prejudices or their behaviour is difficult to measure.

Networks, lobbying, and funding

As mentioned in the results, CSOs often work in alliances to influence policymakers, as CSOs are the bridge between the community and the government (Lebel et al., 2019). To bridge the needs of their community, CSOs can be the watchdog or they can try to actively influence policy by lobbying (Mundkur & Shepherd, 2018). They can for example lobby for more gender-inclusive policy, where it

is effective to work together as the organizations can strengthen each other by sharing knowledge, increasing visibility and facilitating discussion (Appe, 2017; Lebel et al., 2019). The organizations themselves also acknowledge the effectiveness and strength of working together and realize that good coordination is key. They understand that to create an impact they need to work efficiently and effectively and focus on making realistic steps. However, as almost all organizations also mentioned, working together is slower than when the organization would work alone. Reacting quickly to current developments in the Dutch government is therefore very difficult (Albareda, 2018). What exact consequences this has for the CSOs or Dutch policy is not really measurable, but it's important to note that there is room for improvements in this area.

Working together in networks or alliances is also promoted by the Dutch government, and it has several frameworks for such networks to ask for governmental funding. In the Beleidskader Samenspraak en Tegenspraak (=Consultation and Contradiction) (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2014), the government acknowledges the importance of CSOs and their networks and highlights their role in bridging the community and the government as mentioned by Lebel et al. (2019) and Rosilawati et al. (2018). 'Consultation and Contradiction' is a framework for a Public-Private Partnership that acknowledges the knowledge and advice these networks bring forth, but also understands that it's impossible to always share the same opinion. This 'Contradiction' can lead to effective changes in for example policy (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2014; Appe, 2017). The funding for this partnership is fairly demand-led (Krawczyk, 2018), as the CSO can submit an idea for a project and the decides if they will fund it (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2018). As the CSOs can apply for funding, and therefore design the project themselves, they should be able to suit the needs of their target community (Brown, 2016). They could and should design the project bottom-up (Appe, 2017). The disadvantage of the government's SDG-Partnership framework, however, is the fact that its funds are restricted and can therefore only be spent on certain developing countries in e.g. Africa. These countries are on the so-called Private Sector Development-country list (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2016). Thus, the money isn't spent on SDG implementation in the Netherlands. This has also to do with the fact that this partnership has SDG5 as a sub-goal, and the main goals are about ending hunger and creating jobs and economic growth. The Netherlands is therefore not eligible for these funds, which is one of the reasons why CSOs as ActionAid and WECF don't create projects for Dutch women, according to Audrey.

When we look at projects for Dutch women by WOMEN Inc., which are often funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science, the projects are aimed at women's empowerment in the sense of creating awareness about gendered stereotypes existing within society. In that sense, these projects are quite specifically tailored to the target community (Brown, 2016), as for the Netherlands improving on gender equality needs to happen on a more institutional level, but it's also important that the general public (the Dutch society) supports these changes (Roos, WOMEN).

Audrey (WECF) mentioned a shrinking civic space for women's rights organizations because big organizations with a small focus on gender mainstreaming are receiving funding instead of women's organizations (see Challenges according to interviewees). This can have severe consequences when it comes to implementing SDG5 into policy. As Audrey also mentioned, women's organizations often have a more participatory approach, specific knowledge and expertise, which is important to empower women and reduce gender inequalities. When effectively changing policy, especially in PSD-countries, which are often lagging to be more gender inclusive and to empower women (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016), policy may need more than a gender mainstreaming perspective. It's therefore important that the funding governmental institutions support a more participatory and inclusive approach of CSOs if they want to improve women empowerment and gender equality not only in the Netherlands but worldwide (Appe, 2017; FRA, 2017; Mundkur & Shepherd, 2018; Rosilawati et al, 2018).

Conclusions

After all this information about women's empowerment and Civil Society Organizations it is now time to answer the sub-questions, before we can answer the main question '*How can Civil Society Organizations effectively contribute to women's empowerment in Dutch policy?*'

First of all, there is a need to empower women in the Netherlands because there are still strides to be made towards improvement. Of course, women in the Netherlands have a lot more decisional power than women in developing countries, but they are not yet entirely equal to men. There is for example still a wage gap of €300.000 euros between men and women over an average working life. This wage gap mainly exists because of still existing gender roles and stereotypes in laws and regulations that maintain these gender inequalities. To empower women, it's necessary to challenge these stereotypes and make Dutch laws more gender inclusive. CSOs play an important role in this.

CSOs are the bridge between the governmental institutions and the community. They work on influencing governments and their policy, trying to improve the situation of women. Not only women in their own country, but women everywhere in the world by also working on UN-level. To empower women and improve gender equality, many CSOs are working together. ActionAid, WECF, WO=MEN and WOMEN Inc. are all part of different networks and alliances. These networks are increasing the effectiveness of lobbying and influencing policy, as they combine the knowledge and strength of different organizations, which builds capacity. However, working together can also bring some challenges along, such as competition between the organizations working on a project. Additionally, because of their participatory approach, making decisions can take a lot of time; this might be difficult when there is a deadline. It can also be difficult for CSOs working on gender equality to change the public opinion, as unsubstantiated criticism about their campaigns still gets public support. Lastly, another major challenge involves funding. The Dutch government can make changes in its funding framework. This means that CSOs have to adapt to the new situation, or they have to take action (Appe, 2017). In the case of funding only going to big organizations with a small focus on women's rights as Audrey mentioned, women's rights organization can't do anything else than lobby for a specific fund for gender-based issues.

And finally, the Dutch government is taking steps towards empowering women. The government funds different projects of CSOs that are empowering women and increasing gender equality. In that sense, they are improving on empowering women. Because of the work and influence of women organizations on national and international (UN) level, they are being monitored to create (more) gender inclusive policies.

Thus, to answer the main question based on the conclusions given above, Civil Society Organizations work together with many different stakeholders such as different CSOs, researchers, media-parties to influence policymakers. This way the CSOs want to empower women and improve gender equality structurally, by raising awareness about the underlying stereotypes that have a negative impact on gender equality. When policymakers acknowledge the message and information of these CSOs, they can change Dutch policy to be more gender inclusive and help to empower women.

However, when the government works together with or funds projects of CSOs such as ActionAid, WECF (and WO=MEN) they will mainly be focussing on women on the international level, with policies on trade deals and developmental cooperation. However, it is also important for them to focus on their own women, as they could still use empowerment. An organization such as WOMEN Inc. is therefore important to help the government not lose sight of implementing SDG5 and gender responsive policies in their own country as well. Nevertheless, empowering women and improving gender equality is not only possible because of changing policy. The real change might need to arise from society itself.

Future research

This research tried to combine several broad concepts into one thesis. This meant that some topics had to be discussed quite generally. However, it might be interesting to investigate the Dutch funding frameworks for CSOs more in-depth. It could be interesting to shine a light on how a developed country such as the Netherlands are helping to implement SDGs in their own country, but also in other (developing) countries. This could also be related to the changing structure which Audrey mentioned, where bigger organizations with a small focus on gender are more likely to receive funding than smaller (women's) organization.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent

Informed consent

Women are important actors, who can contribute to changes for a better future. However, women do not always have the possibility to create that change. In the Netherlands there is still inequality between men and women in politics and in high functions in the corporate world. Women could use some help, and this help could come from Civil Society Organizations. The purpose of my research is to gain insight into how Civil Society Organizations work and how they can contribute to women empowerment and gender equality in Dutch policy.

- I have had the possibility to ask questions.
- I am satisfied with the answers I received.
- I understand that participation in this research is completely voluntary. I can retreat from this research at any moment. I have the right to not answer interview questions, if I do not want to.
- I understand that my participation in this research is confidential. Without my consent, any form of personal material (audio- and/or video) cannot be used in any way in the presentation of the research's results.
- I understand that this research is for educative purposes only. My contribution will only be used by the researcher or given to the teachers of this course.
- I understand that personal information will be handled confidentially. I understand that my personal information will not be given to third parties outside of the University of Groningen.

Please select your preference by circling YES or NO:

I agree to have this interview recorded with audio-equipment. YES / NO

Do you want to have the possibility to see the notes of your interview questions, to correct them if necessary? YES / NO

If **YES**, please leave your e-mail address below:

“I agree to participate in this individual interview. I agree that I have received a copy of this form.”

Signature participant: _____ Date: _____

“I will follow the terms given in this informed consent. I will guarantee that there will come no harm to the participant during this interview.”

Signature researcher: _____ Date: _____

For potential questions or remarks, you can reach me via the e-mail address provided below.

j.a.stam@student.rug.nl

Thank you for your participation.

Lieneke Stam

Appendix B: Interview Scheme

- Could you tell me about this organization and your role in this organization?
 - o Do you have specific goals and how does this organization try to achieve them?
 - What role do the Sustainable Development Goals play in this organization
 - o Are these goals reached?
 - o How do you reach/empower citizens(women) in the Netherlands?
 - Why does your organization / why should organizations focus on women empowerment and gender equality in the Netherlands?
- You work together with other (similar) organizations, what does this collaboration look like?
 - CSOs/NGOs, research institutes, media, labour unions
 - Do these relations help to reach you goals?
 - Projects, events.
 - o What are difficulties with working together?
 - Is international cooperation more difficult than national?
- How do you finance your organization?
 - Donors (individuals and/or organizations), projects
 - o Is the organization transparent in sharing information about finances to the public?
 - Is the public critical to this organization for receiving donor-money?
 - o What are difficulties that arise?
- The Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations are at the base / important for CSOs/this organization. What role do the United Nations play in the organization?
 - Goal framing/coordinating, advice, lobbying, watchdog, support?
 - o What about the European Union (institutions)?
 - Goal framing/coordinating, advice, lobbying, watchdog, support?
 - Are you in any way constrained by the EU in your work?
 - Do you have close ties to people working for the EU (political actors)?
 - o What about the Dutch government?
 - Do you mostly work on national level or also on municipal (local) level
 - How does your organization influence/work together with the national government?
 - Lobbying, watchdog, working together with **policymakers?**
 - o **How does your organization influence policy making?**
 - What are difficulties in working (together) with (local) governments
- Do you think the Dutch government is making progress in gender equality and/or women empowerment?
 - (Sustainable development) policies, representation?
 - o What are they doing well?
 - o What can they do better?

