



LUNDS
UNIVERSITET

Lund University Master of Science in
International Development and Management
May 2022

**The Gendered Secondary Impacts of COVID-19 as a Critical Juncture for NGO
Program Policy?**

Insights from The Hunger Project

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Abstract

This thesis employs a historical institutionalist lens to analyze whether the gendered impacts of COVID-19 have initiated a critical juncture in The Hunger Project's program policy. Crises such as COVID-19 may lead actors within organizations to question existing policies, giving them greater opportunities than normal to transform these, with lasting consequences.

Theory-testing process-tracing is used to investigate whether the causal mechanisms needed to translate a crisis into lasting policy change are present. Using evidence from semi-structured interviews and documents, this thesis argues that while the primary impacts of COVID-19 created a critical juncture through the adoption of digital technology as an objective and tool, these effects cannot be isolated to the gendered impacts of COVID-19. Instead, the gendered implications of COVID-19 confirmed and accelerated THP's already existing policies emphasizing women-focused community-led development.

The thesis thus expands historical institutionalism to a new domain, NGOs, and shows that actors within these organizations are also guided by historically created institutions that may be altered through critical junctures. Additionally, it contributes an empirical account to otherwise largely speculative literature on COVID-19 as a critical juncture, employing a specifically gender-focused lens.

Key Words: Critical Juncture, COVID-19, Historical Institutionalism, Institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations, Path Dependence, Women's rights

Word Count: 14,788

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank everyone at The Hunger Project Sweden, and particularly my internship supervisor, Liinu, for introducing me to THP's work and for inspiring this study.

Furthermore, I am immensely thankful to all my interviewees. Although ethical guidelines prevent me from thanking each of you personally in these acknowledgements, I am grateful that you took the time to speak with me, and for answering all my questions.

Thank you to my friends, both within and outside LUMID, for your motivation and tireless support. A special thank you to Brock Burton, Claire Valluy, and Emily Elderfield for reading drafts of this thesis and for invaluable feedback.

Thank you to my supervisor, Yahia Mahmoud, for providing feedback on several thesis drafts, and to my supervision group members for insightful discussions.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for supporting me in all my endeavors, academic and otherwise. None of this would have been possible without your support.

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Acronyms

CLD	Community-Led Development
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IGO	Intergovernmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
VAW	Violence against Women
WHO	World Health Organization

1 Introduction

Nohrstedt and Weible (2010: 3) define crises as “periods of disorder in the seemingly normal development of human affairs, along with widespread questioning of established policies, practices, and institutions,”. This definition embodies the assumption that crises are windows of opportunity, in which the inability of current institutions (including policies) to address the problem may create long-lasting change (Hogan, Howlett & Murphy, 2022; Tilly, 1975). When such change occurs, crises become so-called critical junctures.

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic embodies a crisis “like no other” (Lacina, 2020). In May 2022, 515 million cases had been confirmed worldwide, directly causing 6.2 million fatalities (WHO, 2022). The primary impacts of COVID-19, defined as the immediate risk of illness, showed men and women equally likely to be infected, and men at higher risk of severe illness and death (Mukherjee & Pahan, 2021; UNICEF, 2020). However, COVID-19 is “a crisis with a woman’s face,” (Guterres, 2021). The secondary impacts of the pandemic are defined as indirect socioeconomic effects, caused by containment measures, fear, and stigma (UNICEF, 2020). These impacts disproportionately impact the most vulnerable, with rural women and girls in low- and middle-income countries among these (Al-Ali, 2020). Women’s precarious labor market position led them to incur job losses at higher rates than men, with little savings or government support to fall back on (Bundervoet, Dávalos & Garcia, 2022; Profeta, 2020). These income losses in part contributed to an 83-132 million increase in the number of food insecure people, with a higher prevalence among women in every region of the world (FAO et al., 2020; 2021). Additionally, 11 million girls are expected to not return to school, instead engaging in unpaid household work or even being married (Burzynska & Contreras, 2020; UNICEF, 2022), and confinement from lockdowns led to spikes in violence against women (VAW) worldwide (Guidorzi, 2020; Mittal & Singh, 2020). In combination, these impacts have disrupted and reversed progress on several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), threatening their achievement (Filho et al., 2020).

Following these socioeconomic impacts, Hulme and Horner (2021) have called for the pandemic as an opportunity to transform economic and political institutions to better address current and future pandemics, and facilitate progress on achieving the SDGs. However, such assertions have failed to consider the pandemic’s impact on women and girls, and have remained largely speculative (see also Green, 2020; Twigg, 2020). This is in spite of Smith

(2019) and Harman (2016) having critiqued organizations including the World Bank and World Health Organization (WHO) for lacking a gender lens in their response to the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic, and for failing to make subsequent policy changes in part because a gender lens was missing from their policies entirely.

Following such logic, this thesis expects that actors whose objectives are directly threatened by the impacts of COVID-19 are more susceptible to implement changes in response to the pandemic, creating a critical juncture. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are understood to be one such actor. NGOs are defined as “development oriented, officially established participatory organizations...serving communities and external constituencies” (Ghosh, 2009: 475). NGOs’ legitimacy and accountability to both donors and beneficiaries are, in part, determined by their ability to achieve the goals they set out to achieve (Atack, 1999; Edwards & Hulme, 1995). As such, NGOs are expected to be receptive to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 to maintain their legitimacy and accountability. In specific reference to the pandemic’s gendered impacts, NGOs oriented towards women’s rights and empowerment are expected to be most likely to turn these into a critical juncture.

The Hunger Project (THP) is an example of an NGO with an explicit focus on women, citing this as one of the “pillars” of its work (The Hunger Project, n.d.-b). THP was founded in 1977 and currently implements programs in thirteen low- and middle-income countries spread around Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America (termed program countries)¹, as well as conducting fundraising, advocacy, and capacity-building activities in nine high-income countries (termed partner countries)², all of which is coordinated by its global office in the United States. Its programs are oriented towards twelve key thematic areas, including hunger, poverty, gender equality and girls’ empowerment, education, and environment (The Hunger Project, n.d.-a), and are implemented using a community-led development approach (CLD), in which program goals and tools are largely determined by communities in which they are implemented (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012).

¹ The program countries are Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Malawi, Mexico, Mozambique, Peru, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia

² The partner countries are Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom

1.1 Aim, Scope, and Research Questions

This thesis aims to interrogate the assumption that crises create critical junctures for change, and the subsequent expectation that The Hunger Project's prioritization of women's empowerment in its programs makes it more receptive to change following the gendered impacts of COVID-19. To do so, this thesis is guided by three research questions:

1. *To what extent have the perceived secondary gendered impacts of COVID-19 initiated a critical juncture in The Hunger Project's program policy?*
2. *Has the prior focus on women's empowerment at The Hunger Project facilitated the potential of the gendered impacts of COVID-19 as a critical juncture?*
3. *To what extent can changes in The Hunger Project's program policy be traced back to the gendered secondary impacts of COVID-19?*

The scope of this thesis is limited to an analysis of program policy at The Hunger Project before and following the initial impacts of COVID-19. Programs are defined as "operations that are targeted towards a particular goal...and that [produce] results that can be followed up," (Giffen, 2009: 2), describing THP's activities to achieve the objectives within its thematic areas in the program countries. In this thesis, policies are used as a collective term to describe the components of programs, including problems to be solved, tools to solve these, rationales, and causal logic, which guide the operations (Ingram, Schneider & Deleon, 2007). Of particular interest for this study is the identification of new goals and tools.

1.2 Research Purpose

This thesis is situated within a three-fold theoretical and empirical gap. First, critical junctures have been widely studied within historical institutionalism, the theoretical framework adopted in this thesis (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). However, these accounts have been limited to states and inter-governmental organizations (IGOs). Second, although several studies have investigated the potential of COVID-19 as a critical juncture for development, these have remained speculative and third, lacked a focus on specific actors or gendered issues. As such, this study expands the scope of an existing theory to a new empirical realm while providing answers to speculations on responses to COVID-19 in the context of its gendered impacts.

Filling this empirical gap using gender-focused NGOs such as THP is salient for several reasons. NGOs play a key role in targeting several of the secondary impacts of COVID-19, and have become increasingly important actors (Brass, Longhofer, Robinson & Schnable,

2018). Furthermore, NGOs play an important role as advocates seeking to influence other actors (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). An understanding of changes in their program policies may thus be used to further impact policies to better consider the gendered impacts of pandemics. Addressing these effects is key to compensate for the setback in women's empowerment made around the world during the pandemic (UN Women, 2020).

The specific case of The Hunger Project's program policy is well versed to contribute to this research agenda. Firstly, its focus on women's empowerment may lead it to be more receptive to the gendered implications of COVID-19. Secondly, its geographic dispersion in Africa, Asia, and Latin America allows for an understanding of how such impacts have been addressed in several contexts, as well as more overarching adaptations. Third, its engagement in advocacy activities may further impact the policies of actors who have previously lacked a gender lens, to better address the gendered impacts of future pandemics.

1.3 Outline and Argument

The following chapter situates this study in existing literature, before moving on to outline the theoretical framework in chapter three. Chapter four operationalizes the theoretical framework into its methodology, and critically discusses the choices made in conducting this study. Chapter five analyzes and interrogates the findings. These are summarized and contextualized with a particular focus on their implications and the research avenues they open in chapter six. In combination, these chapters are used to argue that while the primary impacts of COVID-19 and their disruption to THP's programs comprise a critical juncture for its program policy, these effects cannot be traced to the pandemic's secondary gendered impacts. Rather, the prior focus on women's empowerment served to mitigate some of these impacts and were perceived to be confirmed and accelerated as a result.

2 Background and Literature Review

The subsequent chapter establishes the three thematic areas from which this thesis departs, briefly touched upon in the introduction. It first outlines empirical inconsistencies concerning crises as critical junctures, before reviewing epidemics as gendered phenomena, and culminates in a review of challenges to extending critical juncture research into the realm of NGOs. In consequence, a gap largely created by the omission of NGOs from policy research and the recency of COVID-19 is identified, which this thesis seeks to fill.

2.1 Crises as Critical Junctures

As stated, this thesis understands crises as “periods of disorder in the seemingly normal development of human affairs, along with widespread questioning of established policies, practices, and institutions” (Nohrstedt & Weible, 2010: 3), suggesting that these events may induce significant change. In policy contexts, crisis situations may relax institutional constraints that maintain existing policies, allowing actors greater freedom than normal to change these (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). The decisions made in the response to and recovery from disasters have the potential to trigger positive feedback mechanisms, creating incentives to further develop and pursue the new policies introduced during the crisis (Gawronski & Olson, 2013). The theoretical assumption that crises are windows of opportunity for change is embedded into historical institutionalist scholarship, the framework that this thesis is grounded in (Pierson, 2004); thus, theoretical intricacies and debates surrounding critical junctures will be further discussed in chapter three.

Empirical support for crises of several types as critical junctures remains inconsistent, and evidence denoting epidemics as critical junctures is scarce. Kreuder-Sonnen and Tantow (2022) argue that the 2014-2016 Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in West Africa created a critical juncture to allow the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to expand its program policy to include new objectives and thematic areas due to demands from states. However, most studies concerned with crisis as a critical juncture have employed the state as its unit of analysis, in line with the origins of historical institutionalism in political science. For example, Castles (2010) and Starke, Kaasch and van Hooren (2013) find limited evidence that past international emergencies have large-scale or long-term welfare policy change. In contrast, Hagelund (2020) demonstrates how the 2015 refugee crisis provided a critical juncture to allow for more restrictive immigration policies in Scandinavia. In moving beyond the realm of policy and government, evidence is somewhat more optimistic. Green’s (2016)

discussion of the Rana Plaza factory disaster in Bangladesh demonstrates how the crisis acted as the push for the signing of the “Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh”, a legally binding document to improve occupational safety in Bangladeshi factories. The disaster created pressure from activists on corporations, trade unions, and clothing retailers to sign the agreement that had been drafted for two years.

2.1.1 COVID-19 as a Potential Critical Juncture

Policy studies interrogating COVID-19 as a critical juncture have largely sided with Castles’ (2010) account casting doubt on the transformative power of crises. Although Hulme and Horner (2021: 183) claim that “COVID-19 is transforming national policies on an unimaginable scale,” empirical accounts find that the changes have been insufficient to be defined as a critical juncture (E.g., Dupont, Oberthür & von Homeyer, 2020; Hogan et al., 2022).

Within social and international development cooperation policy, vague and prescriptive calls have been made for policy changes following COVID-19, again largely relegated to states and IGOs. However, evidence of such instances has remained speculative. Hulme and Horner (2021: 183) argue that that the pandemic could “transform the institutions and norms that have underpinned global development”, in which assistance to lower-income countries to overcome the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 can lead to longer-term strong cooperation in the realm of several issues touched upon by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a sentiment shared by Oldekop et al. (2020). Primarily, literature calling for policy change in response to COVID-19 prescribes a change in goals to reorient policies towards addressing inequalities in internet access and digital means, community-based approaches, and a reorientation towards climate change (Green, 2020; Oldekop et al., 2020; Twigg, 2020). However, such research has not shared empirics on policy changes, and despite focuses on global inequalities, have failed to even mention women.

Research concerning critical junctures for policy, specifically in response to COVID-19, present an empirical and theoretical gap. Empirically, literature on COVID-19 as a critical juncture in development has remained speculative, while maintaining the existing focus on states and IGOs, omitting NGOs as increasingly important actors (Brass et al., 2018). Simultaneously, the call for community-based approaches presents a particular gap for the study of THP, which maintains an existing focus on CLD, and provides an account of the effects of such measures in epidemic response.

2.2 Epidemics as Gendered Crises

Richard Skolnik defines communicable diseases as “illnesses that are caused by a particular infectious agent and that spread directly or indirectly from people to people, from animals to animals, from animals to people to animals,” (2020: 467). When such diseases begin spreading, they have the potential to become epidemics, defined as the rapid spread of a disease within a population, and becoming pandemics when reaching global scale (ibid.). The secondary impacts of epidemics and public health emergencies are recognized as a double-edged sword; they more severely impact women (Davies & Bennett, 2016; Diniz, Brito, Carino & Ambrogi, 2022), but lacking data on such impacts, as well as the invisibility of women in global health governance implies the true extent of these likely remains unknown (Harman, 2016; Wenham et al., 2020a). Moreover, epidemic responses often neglect structural gender impacts in favor of more “urgent” primary effects (Smith, 2019). This section demonstrates the negligible impact of prior epidemics on policy, using the 2014-2016 Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in West Africa as an example³.

2.2.1 Lessons from Ebola

The 2014-2016 EVD outbreak was mainly contained in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (Davies & Bennett, 2016). When the outbreak was declared over, over 28,600 cases and 11,325 deaths had been confirmed (WHO, n.d.). Women were heavily burdened by the primary impacts of the outbreak, comprising up to 75 percent of deaths due to higher risk of exposure (Diggins & Mills, 2015; Hankivsky, 2021; Osotimehin, 2014). The secondary impacts, caused by containment measures, further exacerbated gender inequalities. Women comprise the majority of smallholder farmers in the region, meaning that market closures and travel restrictions imposed to curb the spread significantly debilitated their economic position (Davies & Bennett, 2016; Diggins & Mills, 2015). Moreover, as school closed, an additional 14,000 girls under the age of 18 were estimated to have become pregnant in Sierra Leone, exacerbating an already existing problem of teenage pregnancy. Simultaneously, the government enforced a law banning visibly pregnant girls from schools, preventing their return after these reopened (Denney, Gordon & Ibrahim, 2015; Smith, 2021).

³ EVD was selected among other epidemics, including HIV and Zika, as its transmission mechanism, and thus containment measures are most like those of COVID-19.

In theory, the gender-based crisis sparked by EVD had potential to initiate responses and spark path dependent processes for longer-term change (Pierson, 2000). However, as Davies and Bennett (2016) and Smith (2019) point out, international responses to EVD by states, the WHO and World Bank have neglected the gendered secondary impacts of the pandemic in favor of primary health consequences, termed the “tyranny of the urgent”. Even once the crisis has been mitigated, Harman (2016) indicates how longer-term responses by the World Bank and WHO lack acknowledgement of how such policies impact women. There have been singular examples of small-scale measures taken to mitigate the gendered impacts of EVD, including an initiative for informal centers in Sierra Leone to allow pregnant teenage girls to continue to learn and access resources (Mason, 2016). However, greater exploration of the continuation of such measures is missing. The scarce scholarship on EVD as a critical juncture, such as the previously mentioned study by Kreuder-Sonnen and Tantow (2022) is similarly gender blind. The study also further maintains the omission of NGOs from critical juncture scholarship, despite a finding by Arthur et al. (2022) that trust in non-governmental organizations was higher than in governments.

2.2.2 COVID-19

The scholarship on EVD finds that its gendered impacts have had only limited impacts on policy, if any. However, the unprecedented extent of COVID-19 has presented a renewed opportunity to use the gendered impacts for positive change. As Wenham and Davies (2021) mention, several NGOs and the UN rapidly released reports on the gendered impacts of the pandemic, which may indicate it as an increased policy priority. One NGO that did so was The Hunger Project, the case study for this thesis (The Hunger Project, 2020b). There exists a consensus that COVID-19 has exacerbated and deepened existing inequalities at intersections of gender, race, and socioeconomic positioning (e.g., Al-Ali, 2020; de Paz, 2020; Wenham, Smith & Morgan, 2020b). To situate THP specifically within this context, this section draws on literature discussing the effects in THP’s program countries.

One of the primary emergent issues consistently included in research is gender-based violence (GBV) resulting from COVID-19 containment measures, termed the “shadow pandemic” (Guidorzi, 2020; Parry & Gordon, 2020; Ravindran & Shah, 2020). Lockdowns used to contain the spread of the disease forced households into closer quarters, which, combined with job losses and socioeconomic problems, caused tensions to rise (Johnston, Davies, True & Riveros-Morales, 2021). In India, reports of sexual and gender-based violence more than doubled (Vranda & Febna, 2020), a pattern reiterated by Ssali (2020) in

the context of Uganda. Furthermore, school closures in the beginning of the pandemic disrupted the education of 90% of primary- and secondary-school students (Burzynska & Contreras, 2020). In this context, particularly girls in rural areas that lack access to virtual learning opportunities are likely to discontinue their education to adopt a heavier household workload, as documented in Uganda (Ssali, 2020). Third, labor market sectors targeted by COVID-19 lockdowns were those with higher concentrations of women, for example in Mexico, leading to larger and more persistent job and income losses (Hoehn-Velasco, Silverio-Murillo, de la Miyar & Penglase, 2022). These examples present significant setback to women's rights, and thus THP's objectives in several of its program countries, providing incentive to investigate a potential critical juncture.

2.3 Non-Governmental Organizations

Prior sections of this chapter have established the omission of NGOs from analyses of critical junctures and COVID-19, creating a gap for this thesis to fill. However, delving into NGOs as a research subject is complicated by the limited knowledge on internal workings of these organizations and changes in response to crises (Lewis, 2001).

NGOs are increasingly recognized for their importance as development actors (Desai, 2014). Financially, up to a fifth of official development assistance is channeled through these organizations, and normatively they are recognized as important advocacy champions to bring attention to neglected issues in governments and IGOs (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Union of International Associations, 2018). Nevertheless, literature on how NGOs adopt goals for their programs or tools for achieving these, summarized in the term policy, remains limited. Accounts of institutions as guiding NGO decision-making exist, for example Heyse (2013) considers how institutional factors create expected behaviors within organizations, and thus determine behavior. However, the analysis lacks an application to crises and critical junctures, and what motivates policy and institutional change in such contexts, given its concentration in the sociological institutionalist orientation. Instead, studies concerning NGO policy mainly limit themselves to analyses of the roles NGOs play in governmental processes (e.g., Evans & Shields, 2014; Gordenker & Weiss, 1995; Najam, 2000).

Cases concerned with internal policy change within NGOs have mainly relegated themselves to studies of how governments and donors may influence the workings of these organizations to better achieve donors' objectives (Davies, 1997). For example, Johansson et al. (2010) use a case study of Swedish NGO WeForest to analyze development change. However, the

authors do not develop on the mechanisms by which these changes occur, nor are they in the context of crises as critical junctures.

2.4 Research Gap

This literature review has reiterated the research contribution mentioned in the introduction. The thesis thus situates itself in a threefold theoretical and empirical gap, largely created by the omission of NGOs from critical juncture research, as well as the novelty of COVID-19. While acknowledging the difficulty of extending political science perspectives into NGOs, in part due to knowledge gaps of how policy changes occur within these, this thesis thus extends critical juncture analysis into a new empirical realm. Furthermore, largely speculative accounts of COVID-19 as a critical juncture for social and development cooperation policy provide a space for an empirical account to verify these speculations in the specific case of THP's program policy, with a focus on women's empowerment.

3 Theoretical Framework

The subsequent chapter considers historical institutionalism as the theoretical point of departure for this thesis, delineates its scope, and outlines the framework that will be used to apply assumptions to THP's response to the gendered impacts of COVID-19.

3.1 Conceptualizing Institutions

This thesis conceptualizes institutions as the “*relatively enduring* features of political and social life (rules, norms, procedures) that structure behavior and that cannot be changed easily or instantaneously,” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010: 4). In doing so, institutions are presumed to include formal factors such as rules and procedures, as well as rather informal and unspoken features like norms⁴ (Hodgson, 2006). These serve to determine accepted and expected behavior for actors within an organization and guide responses to new issues, such as the gendered impacts of COVID-19 by determining priorities and setting courses of action (Heyse, 2013; March & Olsen, 1984; Thelen & Steinmo, 1992).

Given the topic of this thesis, gender institutions that guide program policy are of particular interest. In their broadest sense, these are defined as “the socially acquired notions of masculinity and femininity by which women and men are identified,” (Henshall Momsen, 2004: 2). Within organizations such as the WHO, this may be manifested through the lacking representation of women, as well as the absence of women in its policies, which subsequently lead to their invisibility in epidemic response (Krook & Mackay, 2011; Wenham & Davies, 2021). THP was chosen as a case for analysis in part because of the focus on women's empowerment in its programs, and the expectation that this may result in greater responsiveness to gendered impacts of COVID-19 (Wenham & Davies, 2021). The institutions include formalized codes like gender strategies and white papers, but also perceptions of the expectations that these have created among program staff within the organization. THP states that gender equality is one of its core principles, suggesting the mainstreaming of gender in its institutions (The Hunger Project, n.d.-c). Gender mainstreaming involves “efforts to scrutinize and reinvent processes of policy formulation and implementation across all issue areas to address and rectify persistent and emergent

⁴ The terms organization and institution are often conflated, but while all organizations are institutions, not all institutions, as defined above, are organizations.

disparities between men and women,” (True & Mintrom, 2001). As such, gender likely also permeates and is impacted by institutions guiding programs not as explicitly related to women’s empowerment (The Hunger Project, n.d.-c).

3.1.1 Institutional and Policy Change

Given the novelty of COVID-19, and the definition of institutions as relatively enduring features, this thesis recognizes that it is too early for an analysis of institutional change following COVID-19. As such, its scope is limited to only consider program policies, which entail the problems that actors determine as priorities, the tools used to address these, rationales, and causal logic (Ingram et al., 2007). As Banks and Hulme (2012) deem NGOs relatively flexible actors, this thesis presumes that sufficient time has passed since the onset of the pandemic to consider policy change beyond immediate pandemic responses. The focus on policies in a critical juncture analysis further follow similar scholarship on COVID-19 outlined in chapter two (e.g, Hogan et al., 2022).

3.2 Historical Institutionalism

This thesis draws on historical institutionalism as its theoretical framework, more specifically the analytical tools of critical junctures and path dependency. Historical institutionalism includes both formal and informal institutions in its analysis, and posits that while these are not the sole determinant of outcomes, they guide preferences and decisions (Thelen & Steinmo, 1992). These definitions thus align with the conceptualization of institutions that this thesis adopts.

The theory has been applied to many institutions at local, national, and international levels (Fioretos, Falleti & Sheingate, 2016). The essence of historical institutionalism is its emphasis on temporality, arguing for the significance of timing and order of events in leading to the creation, maintenance, and change of institutions in specific cases (Fioretos, 2011; Pierson, 2004). The choices made by powerful actors at specific points in time (critical junctures) create institutions that benefit them in enhancing their own position, or lead to the achievement of some goal (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). The formal or informal institutions they create serve a benefit to those who created them, as well as subsequent influential actors, and this positive feedback creates paths that are increasingly difficult to stray away from (path dependence). The institutions are maintained for as long as they remain beneficial to the influential actors with the potential to change them (Pierson, 2004). The concepts of critical junctures and path dependency, as well as their use in this thesis, are further discussed below.

Historical institutionalism has not been applied to NGOs, in line with the general relegation of NGOs as secondary actors in political science and international relations literature (Ghosh, 2009). Nevertheless, the assumptions of historical institutionalism are applicable to NGOs in similar ways. These institutions were initiated by influential individuals who saw benefit from them, although the benefits they seek may be different than in the government and IGO settings usually studied. While debates and speculations regarding NGOs' motivations reach beyond the scope of analysis, this thesis argues that institutions guiding NGO policymaking serve the benefit of aiding organizations in fulfilling their objectives, the purpose they were created for, and which may contribute to reiterating their legitimacy relative to donors and beneficiaries (Atack, 1999; Lewis, Kanji & Themudo, 2021). On a broader scale, procedures and codes of conduct that guide operations are largely approved by the board of directors, making up a group of influential actors (e.g., The Hunger Project, 2021b). However, on a program scale, staff involved in the formulation and implementation of these may observe the need for new policies and resulting positive feedback mechanisms that lead to new path dependent processes and institutions. As such, they become the influential actors of interest to this analysis.

It is worth noting that historical institutionalism does not have an explicit gender lens and focus on gendered institutions. However, several authors have employed the approach to gendered issues. For example, Hašková and Saxonberg (2011) draw on historical institutionalist arguments to trace the origins of family policy in Slovakia and the Czech Republic; Waylen (2009) uses similar influences to trace the origins of women's empowerment in democratic transitions in several countries, and Grace (2011: 475) explores critical junctures for child care policy in Canada. Thus, this thesis does not apply an explicit feminist institutionalism, but applies the assumptions and positionings of historical institutionalism to gendered institutions.

3.2.1 Critical Junctures

Critical junctures are “events and developments...generally concentrated in a relatively short period, that have a crucial impact on outcomes later in time,” (Capoccia, 2016: 89). These events typically manifest differently in distinct contexts and lead to different longer-term outcomes, in part mediated by pre-existing institutions (Collier & Collier, 1991; Slater & Simmons, 2010).

According to Soifer (2012), critical junctures are comprised of *permissive* and *productive* conditions that lead to change. Permissive features are those that allow for change to happen; Katznelson (2003) deems these as events in which existing institutions are questioned. In other words, when the positive feedback mechanisms that maintained previously established institutions are no longer deemed as beneficial by influential actors. Secondly, a critical juncture must produce productive causal mechanisms, which create the initial response and subsequent change, and may be comprised of several sub-processes (Soifer, 2009). Neither of these alone is sufficient to produce the divergence of a critical juncture, but together they produce the consequential change necessary for such an event. Capoccia and Kelemen (2007) further emphasize the importance of counterfactual analysis in the interrogation of critical junctures, and as such table 1 displays alternative events if either or both conditions are missing.

		Permissive conditions	
		Absent	Present
Productive conditions	Absent	Status quo	Missed opportunity
	Present	Incremental change	Critical juncture

Table 1: Permissive and Productive conditions and outcomes (Soifer, 2012: 1580)

Furthermore, potential critical junctures do not occur in a vacuum, but in the context of pre-existing and mediating factors, including prior institutions, known as critical antecedents (Slater & Simmons, 2010). It is these that mediate how critical juncture events lead to different outcomes in distinct cases (Collier & Collier, 1991; Slater & Simmons, 2010). In the case of THP and gendered impacts of COVID-19, I expect that permissive conditions may include the questioning of prior program policies related to the organization’s work with women, and subsequent change in direct response to the gendered impacts of COVID-19 that prior policies were unable to address.

However, after establishing that critical junctures must create productive mechanisms that lead to significant policy change, definitions disagree on what constitutes sufficient divergence for a critical juncture, compared to what Soifer (2009) terms “status quo” or a “missed opportunity”. Hogan (2006: 664) argues that for an event to be considered a critical juncture, it must lead to “swift” and “encompassing” change, which he deems change that

occurs quickly, and which influences most of those who are part of the institution, but does not offer much more as to what is considered change. Dupont et al. (2020) and Hogan et al. (2022) offer two further conflicting definitions of the extent of the change needed for a critical juncture. While Dupont et al. (2020) argue that the acceleration of existing policies constitute sufficient grounds for a critical juncture, Hogan et al. (2022) disagree, asserting that the direction of policy must be altered to constitute a critical juncture. This thesis sides with the latter, taking that policy change must diverge from current paths based on the goals it seeks to achieve, the tools used to achieve it, the motivation behind these, and implementation tools (Ingram et al., 2007).

3.2.2 Path Dependence

In addition to permissive and productive conditions, Soifer (2012) posits that the change initiated during the critical juncture must endure for it to be considered as such, which occurs through path dependence. Broadly, path dependence can be defined as “what has happened at an earlier point in time will affect the possible outcomes of a sequence of events occurring at a later point in time,” (Sewell, 1996: 262-263). As was previously mentioned, institutions are maintained over time because they continue to be beneficial to those with the power to change them (Pierson, 2004). As positive feedback mechanisms from these paths occur, they become increasingly difficult to stray away from, summarized as path dependence. In the event of a critical juncture, these positive feedback mechanisms are disrupted, creating the permissive conditions for change (Soifer, 2009).

The critical juncture event sets off new path dependent processes through positive feedback mechanisms to these decisions (Capoccia, 2016). In the case of THP, this thesis expects that resumed progress towards the organization’s following COVID-19 will set off such mechanisms. In doing so, it considers “longer-term changes” as those not immediately related to the setbacks from COVID-19, but in resumption of more regular program activities.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The analytical tools discussed in the previous section are compiled and adapted to create the analytical framework that guides the remainder of this discussion, seen in figure 1.

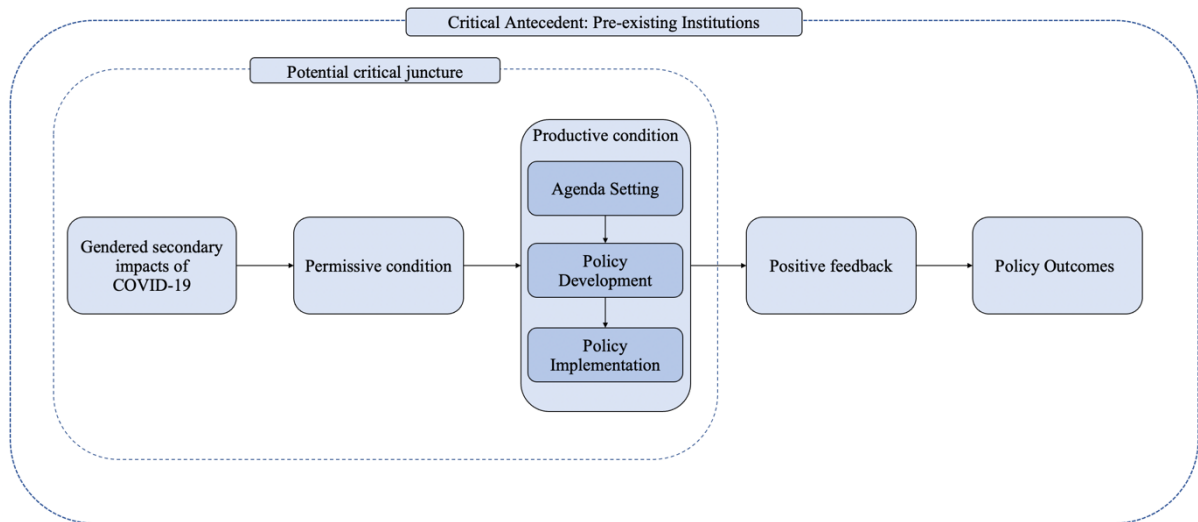


Figure 1: Analytical framework

The analytical framework incorporates Slater and Simmons' (2010) considerations of antecedent conditions, as well as Soifer's (2012) conceptualization of the permissive and productive conditions that comprise a critical juncture, and Pierson's (2004) contribution of path dependence. These are the three causal mechanisms that interact to produce the policy outcomes resulting from the gendered impacts of COVID-19 (Beach & Pedersen, 2013). Simultaneously, they comprise the three criteria that the event must meet to be considered a critical juncture. Importantly, the critical juncture in itself ends when the productive condition has occurred, but whether it can be deemed as such is determined by subsequent positive feedback and policy outcomes (Soifer, 2012).

The analytical framework adapts these conditions to include a sub-process within the productive condition, which Soifer (2012) notes may produce a more complete analysis. NGOs have been largely omitted from policy research, and a clearly delineated policy process within these organizations thus does not exist. Hence, the policy process depicted is adapted from Najam (2000), as each step may correspond to a change in one aspect of policy that may create a critical juncture (Ingram et al., 2007). In the agenda setting phase, actors decide on issues of priority, corresponding to goals pursued; during policy development, they determine the means to achieve these goals, delineating activities; policy implementation involves acting on the goals, determining tools used to conduct activities. In line with debates on sufficient divergence for a critical juncture, divergence in the productive condition is considered a change in at least one stage. Furthermore, given the scope of this thesis and its level of analysis, only changes occurring in at least two countries are considered.

4 Methodology

This chapter outlines the study's methodological choices following the previously established theoretical framework, and critically examines both justifications for and limitations of these.

4.1 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

The ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin this study are in line with the turn towards interpretivism in historical institutionalism (Fioretos et al., 2016; Skocpol & Pierson, 2002). Originating in the assumption that reality is constructed and context-specific, this study assumes a social ontology (Steinmo, 2008). In contrast to universal laws that govern the natural world, social reality is specific to a particular context, and, in part, mediated by institutions (Immergut, 1998).

The ontology further guides the epistemology, defined as “what counts as knowledge within the world,” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017: 27). To recall, historical institutionalists posit that institutions are created and maintained by actors (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). As reality cannot be detached from these institutions, the perceptions, and interpretations that actors make about the reality constitute knowledge. This assertion, in combination with the study's goal of understanding actors' interpretations of COVID-19 and subsequent actions, constitutes a subjectivist epistemology (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). By extension, the subjectivist epistemology further entails that the knowledge originating in this study has been created through the researcher's thinking, informed by both the data collected and prior personal experiences (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Punch, 2005). As such, it is essential to reflect upon and consider the researcher's positionality, as is developed in subsequent sections.

While this study mainly employs an interpretivist paradigm as its core philosophical assumption, its focus on a feminist research ethic and subject also lead it to draw on a critical paradigm, seeking to address the issues leading to oppression and marginalization of women in the context of COVID-19 (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). As such, this study employs a feminist ontology, understanding that the reality of COVID-19 is mediated by gender.

4.2 Research Design

This study aims to interrogate the assumption of the gendered impacts of COVID-19 as a critical juncture in The Hunger Project's program policy, making a case study the most suitable research design (Yin, 2009). More specifically, a qualitative case study was chosen

because historical institutionalism posits that institutions guiding organizations are created by influential actors within these, and this study sought to gain an in-depth how they had interpreted the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and consequently changed program policy (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Swanborn, 2010).

Case studies are frequently critiqued for lacking generalizability due to their reliance on singular or small numbers of observation. However, the aim of historical institutionalist research is not to establish laws or rules, but understand the particularities of specific cases (Steinmo, 2008). Hence, generalizability is not of concern to this study.

4.2.1 Case Selection

THP's program policy comprises an instrumental case, which is used to understand the potential of the gendered impacts of COVID-19 as a critical juncture in organizations already focused on women's rights before the pandemic (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The case was thus selected using a typical case selection method (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). THP is one of many women-focused organizations operating in similar geographic regions and grappling with the gendered impacts of the pandemic.

The case is bounded, in that it only considers program policy as its variable of interest but does not limit itself to a singular country or region. The focus level was primarily selected for pragmatic reasons concerning access (*ibid.*). Many of the individual country offices are relatively small with few employees, making it difficult to collect sufficient interview and secondary data to determine both prior institutions and responses to COVID-19. This level of focus may be critiqued by feminist researchers, who argue that it thus neglects locally specific context that determine women's lived experiences of the pandemic, which THP responds to (Ackerly & True, 2010). However, while valuable, such research is beyond the scope of this study.

4.3 Data Collection

Data was primarily collected in the form of semi-structured interviews, and complemented by secondary data from annual reports, press releases, and strategy documents. The subsequent section outlines how such data was collected and considers the sampling methods employed.

4.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect primary data from eight program staff at THP (see Appendix 1). This interview type was selected to allow the researcher to cover all topics

necessary for the defined research question, while remaining flexible enough to delve deeper into topics of interest that may arise during the interview (Bryman, 2016). The interviews were structured by the interview guide (see Appendix 2), which set out the questions to ask, as well as examples of probes to develop on topics. The themes discussed in the interview included pre-existing gender institutions, perceptions of how COVID-19 impacted women in THP's program areas, short- and long-term responses, as well as lessons learned from COVID-19.

The researcher consciously triangulated purposive and convenience sampling to select respondents for the study from the target population of staff at THP (Fink, 2003). Purposive sampling was selected because the study was interested in a specific group of people within THP, those termed "influential actors" within historical institutionalism who have the potential to influence policy, which were determined to be program staff (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). This class of respondents includes staff at each stage of program planning and implementation, including program managers, monitoring & evaluation staff, coordinators, and country directors. The researcher sought to include respondents working in the program countries, but also staff from partner countries and the global coordinating office to provide a better overview of the organization's overall responses to COVID-19. Given time and resource constraints, only respondents who shared a language with the researcher were sampled, to eliminate the need for a translator. Potential respondents were contacted via email by the researcher, and those who responded and were available were interviewed. Several potential respondents who were contacted did not deem themselves the most appropriate for participation, and as such referred others for participation instead.

In total, eight respondents were interviewed (see Appendix 1). The researcher intended to only conduct individual interviews, but one respondent invited another colleague to the interview, the impacts of which are further reflected upon in the ethical considerations and limitations. Of the eight respondents, five were in program countries, one in a partner country, and two in the global coordinating office. This was thought to provide a useful balance between the country-specific observations in program countries, and overarching patterns from the partner country and global office. The five respondents in program countries were in India, Mexico, and Uganda, and as such the examples used in the analysis are mainly concentrated in these locations.

The sampling of participants from diverse location was enabled through the use of Zoom to record and conduct interviews (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey & Lawless, 2019).

Furthermore, the online format allowed the researcher to disregard COVID-19 restrictions in the different locations. However, as Abidin and de Seta (2020) point out, virtual interviews may lead to anxieties and discomforts due participants possibly being unfamiliar with such environments. Nevertheless, most respondents commented on being used to working digitally, especially given the pandemic. Furthermore, decent internet connections may have posed a problem (Lobe, Morgan & Hoffman, 2020). This was thankfully only a problem with one participant and is thus unlikely to have altered conclusions.

4.3.2 Document Analysis

A document analysis was used to complement the interview data to triangulate data. This measure was thought to be able to improve the credibility of this study's findings by verifying observations and mentioning topics that respondents may have forgotten to bring up or not deemed important (Bowen, 2009). These data sources were obtained through a review of the organization's global and country-specific websites, where applicable. The documents included annual reports, press releases, as well as strategy and policy documents (see Appendix 3)

In total, around thirty documents were surveyed, although many were found not to be relevant for the given project based on topic or timeframe. It is important to note that, unlike interviews, these documents were not created for the purpose of this study. As such, they may lack explicit accounts of some of the topics of interest to the study, such as critiques of existing institutions expected in the permissive condition. Furthermore, to gather a variety of data, the documents were in several languages spoken by the researcher (Swedish, English, and German).

4.4 Data Analysis

All interview data and documents were imported into NVivo, which was used as the main tool for analysis, guided by the analytical framework. Given that historical institutionalism is inherently oriented towards inductive analysis, and away from pre-determine criteria to search for (Harriss, 2006), the data was initially coded inductively to identify patterns in the data without relying on pre-defined categories or themes to search for. Subsequently, the codes were categorized along the stages of the analytical framework and linked.

A theory-testing process tracing method was used for analysis. This approach draws on theory for the proposed causal mechanisms that link the secondary gendered impacts of COVID-19 with program policy outcomes and tests whether these are present in the case

(Beach & Pedersen, 2013). Causal mechanisms are understood to be “a complex system that produces a behavior by the interaction of a number of parts,” (Glennan, 2002: 344). At each stage, the expected condition is tested using the data collected, to deem whether the causal mechanism is present (Beach, 2016).

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Utmost care was taken by the researcher to follow the ethical guidelines put forth by the Swedish Research Council concerning informing participants, obtaining consent, confidentiality, and the use of the data collected (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). Firstly, a research proposal was created and sent to all individuals who were contacted for potential interviews. Secondly, all respondents were sent a consent form prior to their participation (see appendix 4). The consent form outlined the aim of the research, how confidentiality would be ensured, and how the data obtained from participants would be used. In the context of this study, full confidentiality was difficult to achieve, as several of my participants had been referred to the researcher by others, or in one case, were interviewed together, and as such their identity was known to the individual who had referred them. Nevertheless, the researcher took great care to maintain confidentiality as far as possible, and the identity of the respondents was not disclosed to anyone by the researcher herself. Before the beginning of each interview, informed consent was obtained verbally from participants and recorded. Verbal consent was used in part for logistical reasons, given that interviews were conducted digitally.

This study does not directly interact with any exposed groups, such as women and children in vulnerable communities (Stewart-Withers, Banks, McGregor & Meo-Sewabu, 2014). Nevertheless, as feminist researchers emphasize, there exists a power imbalance between the researcher and the respondents, as the researcher determined the scope and direction of research, and thus also factors such as interview questions. The semi-structured interview mode allowed respondents greater freedom to stray off topic and discuss topics they deemed important, but within the control of the researcher (Bryman, 2016).

4.5.1 Positionality and Reflexivity

Given the interpretivist nature of this study discussed in the first section of the methodology, positionality and reflexivity were particularly important to reflect upon. This thesis takes positionality as the “researcher’s personal, social and cultural position and how these affect the entire research process,” (Hammett, Twyman & Graham, 2015: 51).

The primary factor guiding the researcher's positionality in this study is her previous experience with The Hunger Project, having interned at the organization's Sweden office for four months. This position may be seen as an advantage, as it allowed the researcher to build prior rapport with members of the organization, which may have facilitated conversations with respondents (Bryman, 2016; Hammett et al., 2015). However, many respondents were individuals whom the researcher had not interacted with before, and as such the significance of this rapport in these cases is uncertain.

Nevertheless, the positionality of the researcher as a prior intern with the organization is likely to have created expectations on both the respondents' and her own part. On the part of participants, this may pertain specifically to expectations surrounding the researcher's prior knowledge of THP's program policy, which was expressed by several respondents. Additionally, the researcher's involvement with the organization and the institutions that guide it may have also led her to construct this "field" in a particular way, creating expectations of how respondents would answer and the topics they would discuss (Funder, 2005).

Furthermore, the researcher's positionality is guided by her education and origins in the Global North. Particularly in interviews with employees from, and in, the Global South, their perceptions, and expectations of my understanding of the realities within these countries may mediate the interactions in the interview.

4.6 Limitations

The subsequent section briefly explores the methodological limitations of this study, largely created by a combination of choices made by the author, as well as extenuating circumstances beyond her control.

First, the scope of this study was intentionally limited to the context of THP's program policy. As mentioned, critique of case studies as non-generalizable was thus disregarded (Steinmo, 2008). However, the sampling of participants may have limited the study's generalizability beyond these intentions. Purposive and convenience sampling are recognized as creating biased samples that may not be entirely representative of the target population (Fink, 2003), and respondents in program countries only came from three countries. As such, although some examples are included from other countries, the generalizability of these findings to remaining program countries is not certain. However, observations by respondents from the global office suggest relatively similar effects across other program countries.

Nevertheless, a closer geographical focus on one of these other program countries may have produced other findings, as could the addition of further respondents from other countries to this study.

Second, as mentioned, one of the interviews was conducted with two respondents. The limitation of this was mainly in the form of a methodological inconsistency that may have compromised some comparability (Bryman, 2016). Interviewing two respondents leads to some similar considerations as those surrounding focus groups, including interactions between respondents and how these may impact responses (Belzile & Öberg, 2012). However, the researcher found that the presence of two interviewees was beneficial for the data produced from the interview; the participants were able to develop on each other's responses, which was found to enrich the data. As such, an interesting alternative approach to this study may have been the expanded use of focus groups and group interviews.

Third, limitations may be pointed out regarding the sampling of employees at the organization. Although the focus of this study was on how members at the organization understood gendered experiences of COVID-19 and adjusted policy in response, it would have been useful to collect evidence on the direct lived experiences of women in communities on their perceptions, as is encouraged within feminist research methodologies to verify the respondents' perceptions of such impacts (Ackerly & True, 2010).

Finally, language posed a potential limitation to this study. Data was collected in three languages spoken by the researcher (Swedish, English, and German), which was beneficial for data breadth but may have caused some meanings to be lost in translation, based on the researcher's interpretations of these in the three languages, and competency in translation (Birbili, 2000).

5 Analysis and Discussion

The subsequent chapter is structured around the analytical framework presented in chapter two and serves to answer the research questions set out in the introduction. As such, the purpose of the analysis is threefold. Firstly, it assesses the extent to which the perceptions of gendered impacts of COVID-19 have initiated a critical juncture. Secondly, it examines whether THP's prior focus on women has facilitated a potential critical juncture. Thirdly, it discusses whether policy changes following COVID-19 can be specifically traced to its gendered effects. The analysis is used to argue that while the primary impacts of COVID-19 initiated a critical juncture for THP's program policy, these changes are not clearly traceable to the pandemic's gendered impacts. Rather, respondents found that COVID-19 confirmed and accelerated its existing policies concerning women empowerment.

5.1 Critical Antecedent

The critical antecedent describes pre-existing conditions that mediate the impact of a crisis event on policy (Slater & Simmons, 2010). In this section, I outline the pre-existing program policies that set out the motivation and goals of THP's women empowerment strategy, as well as the tools used to achieve these. These are expected to facilitate responses to the gendered impacts of COVID-19. The policy embodies three aspects of empowerment identified by Mosedale (2005): empowerment is facilitated but not bestowed by an outsider; empowerment embodies decision-making capacity; empowerment is not a product, but rather a process. Women's empowerment comprises a central "pillar" in THP's program policy (respondents 4, 5); the positive externalities of focusing on women underpin several thematic issues, which is operationalized through its women-centered community-led development method (The Hunger Project, 2019).

Respondent 2 traces the origins of the multi-sectoral bottom-up focus with women at the core to another critical juncture, The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Rather than acting as a crisis, the conference underpinned the importance of women's rights as human rights, which 65 governments committed to at the conference (Maran, 1996), creating a permissive condition to better integrate gender. Subsequently, consultations with, who respondent 2 describes as, local feminists were used to integrate women into community-led strategies (respondent 2). The centrality of gender in THP's program policy appears well institutionalized, indicated by consensus among respondents and documents.

In consequence, women's empowerment is considered a pillar of THP's programs through the framing of what respondents deem "patriarchal mindsets" as the root of many of its target issues, in an analogy that respondent 4 compares to an iceberg. Patriarchy is understood as a "social structure where the actions and ideas of men are dominant over those of women," (Soman, 2009: 253). Patriarchy, and other invisible structures that disempower women, are manifested in THP's thematic issue areas, including hunger, poverty, gender equality, health, nutrition, education, and social cohesion (The Hunger Project, n.d.-a). Similarly, THP frequently refer to improvements in these areas as evidence of empowerment, for example, that "families are healthier, more children go to school, agricultural productivity improves and incomes increase," (The Hunger Project, 2019: 6). As such, women empowerment, in the form of decision-making capacity, is a strategic objective due to positive externalities.

The underpinning institution of patriarchal mindsets at the root of development is operationalized through the policy termed "women-focused community-led development" (The Hunger Project, 2019: 6). As previously stated, CLD is conceptualized as an approach to development in which the objectives and tools are guided by the citizens' views and local leadership, with support from the organization, in this case THP (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012). In women focused CLD, the objective becomes to empower women participate in local leadership in several ways, to capture the benefits outlined in the previous paragraph. The community-led aspect embodies the conception that empowerment cannot be bestowed (Mosedale, 2005). The different types of leadership are operationalized based on locally relevant contexts, identified through the consultations with local activists mentioned by respondent 2. In India, women's empowerment is sought through elected women in local village councils, called *gram panchayats*. A law enacted in 1992 demanded that a third of seats in local *panchayats* be reserved for women, thus granting them leadership in an official sense (Jayal, 2006). Supporting these women in these elected leadership roles thus became a focus issue in India, conducting trainings on their rights and duties as elected women (respondent 1). In Sub-Saharan Africa, the focus lies in economic empowerment (respondent 2). Community animators, the majority of which are women are trained to conduct trainings on independent income generation, nutrition, and health (The Hunger Project, 2020a). In Latin America, the focus became to strengthen women within indigenous movement that were already occurring (respondent 2), and to encourage both economic and bodily autonomy (respondent 7).

The centrality of women's empowerment in official publications and discussed by respondents contrasts the gender-blindness that Harman (2016) describes in global health governance, which causes the ignorance of gender in epidemics. This focus, in combination with health as a focus issue suggests that program staff will consider gendered secondary impacts of COVID-19 as a higher priority, facilitating its likelihood as a critical juncture.

5.2 Permissive Condition

The permissive condition mechanism is described as the stage at which existing institutional constraints begin to break down, allowing for the adoption of new policies, owing that those already in place no longer serve their intended benefit to influential actors (Katznelson, 2003; Soifer, 2012). In contrast with previously stated expectations, this section is used to argue that the gendered impacts of COVID-19 did not create a permissive condition for large-scale change. Instead, respondents expressed their further conviction of THP's methodology to mitigate these. However, the disruption caused the pandemic's primary impacts led respondents to question the immediate viability of THP's implementation policy.

Interestingly, the gendered impacts of COVID-19 were not addressed to the extent that was expected. Several respondents had to be probed on the gender-specific impacts of COVID-19 on women, as this was not mentioned in their first response to question six (Appendix 2). This may suggest that observed gender-specific impacts were not the most pressing priorities. Nevertheless, observations in line with those outlined by the literature in chapter two were reported. Respondent 1 noted that they believed the "experience of the pandemic has been common" and that they didn't believe that they had experienced anything "which has not been talked about". This is further supported in that similar gendered impacts were reported across several geographies. For example, in line with Al-Ali (2020) and (Wenham et al., 2020b), respondents reported a "shadow pandemic", through the sharp rise in violence against women (VAW). In Latin America, respondents 4, 6, and 7 noted that as men returned to their rural communities, tensions began rising in homes and domestic violence increased. A similar occurrence was noted in Uganda, where "the emotional and psychosocial support structures are breaking down" and "tensions are rising", leading to gender-based violence as women are trapped at home (respondent 5). Additionally, in India, respondent 1 noted "extreme forms of violence, forced marriages, [and] trafficking". These observations were confirmed by respondents 2 and 8, who spoke of violence against women in several areas. Several respondents further noted the livelihood impacts of COVID-19 containment. For example, respondent 3 noted the rise of transportation costs due to social distancing

measures, with the consequence of barring women from their typical economic activities. In Mexico, “artisan women...weren’t able to sell their products,” to make their living (respondent 6), and in Uganda, lockdowns and transportation impediments prevented women from selling their products on markets, leading to “breakdown in their economic power” (respondent 5). Although far more examples exist, these observations support the remark made by respondent 1, that many of the experiences of COVID-19 have been common, these have “[played] out in different ways in different geographies where [THP works]”, in line with THP’s existing policy.

However, although participants clearly observe gendered impacts of COVID-19 as crisis, the expected questioning of existing policies was missing, both regarding gender and otherwise. Rather, participants perceived more conviction of pre-existing policies, with respondent 5 instead describing it as “an opportunity to...test [their] methodology and prove it,” and respondent 1 noted that “[their] strategy has proved to be very, very relevant and very useful.” While the distinction between measures put in place by THP and local leaders themselves is not always clear, the advantage of gender-focused community-led development was noted repeatedly, emphasizing how local female leaders “played a huge role in mobilizing local responses to people whose livelihoods had been devastated,” (respondent 2). This notion is in line with Twigg’s (2020) prediction for COVID-19 as a critical juncture in encouraging locally-led development, realizing the ability of communities to self-organize in the face of such crisis. As such, respondents found that existing policies and facilitation of women’s empowerment had mediated some of the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and did not facilitate the creation of a critical juncture.

In contrast, the disruption of activities following the primary risk of infection was a main concern expressed by participants. As respondent 1 notes, their “work involves getting people together” and “requires an interface”, which was not possible given the risk of infection and the lockdowns imposed in India and Uganda, among others. Respondent 4 further describes that they had to “stop all of the activities” and that some needed to be rescheduled. When COVID-19 disrupted these, existing policies no longer served the benefit they were created for in achieving these outcomes. The disruption of COVID-19 to activities, and as such the organization’s objectives, created a permissive condition through which respondents questioned the focus on bringing groups together for trainings and other activities, opening for a change.

Thus, in returning to research question three, whereas the primary impacts of COVID-19 led to a permissive condition, this cannot be traced to its secondary impacts. Per Soifer's (2012) reasoning, this eliminates a necessary condition for a critical juncture. However, while large-scale change may be unlikely, the gendered impacts of COVID-19 present challenges to THP's goals, and may thus open for smaller-scale, incremental change as is seen in table 1 in the theoretical framework.

5.3 Productive Condition

Following the permissive condition, the productive condition is the second expected causal mechanism to occur, should the gendered impacts of COVID-19 comprise a critical juncture. Soifer (2012) terms this as the point during which change is enacted by influential actors to create policy change. The extent of divergence necessary to comprise a critical juncture is not entirely clear, as captured in the disagreement between Dupont et al. (2020) and Hogan et al. (2022). To recall the analytical framework, this thesis considers sufficient divergence to be a change in at least one of the components of policy as set out by Ingram et al. (2007), including problems to solve, tools to solve these, and motivations behind these. Further, this change must have occurred in at least two geographic areas, given the organization as the study's unit of analysis. The mechanisms are analyzed through three sub-processes: agenda setting, policy development, and policy implementation (Najam, 2000). I argue that, whereas the primary impacts of COVID-19 meet the criteria for a critical juncture, the gendered impacts addressed do not. Rather, the problems focused on were already existing at THP, and targeted using already existing methods, although focus and resources were redirected through changing priorities.

5.3.1 COVID-19 Containment

Following the identification of the permissive condition, both respondents and official documentation identified COVID-19 containment as a priority. Given the novelty of the pandemic, this produced an entirely new problem for THP; they had not experienced any similar health emergency in its partner communities before, as none of its partner communities experienced large EVD outbreaks, for example (respondent 2). The identification of COVID-19 as a new problem thus supports the notion of a productive condition, and the steps by which it was addressed are seen in figure 2.

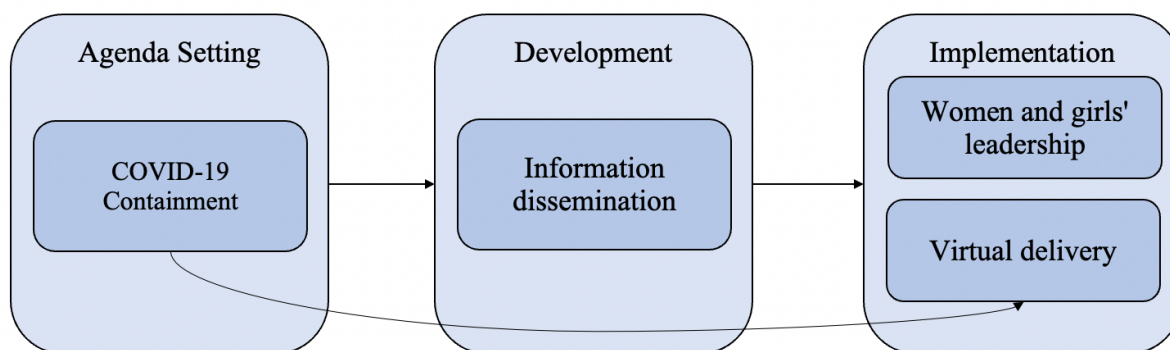


Figure 2: COVID-19 Containment Productive Condition

On a global scale, respondent 2 noted that “coping with COVID...has been at the heart of the program for, certainly for 2020,”. Furthermore, respondent 3 accounted that THP rapidly began collecting data linked to COVID-19, including those on face mask and hand sanitizer distribution. In part, COVID-19 containment was motivated by safety, for example, as respondent 7 noted that communities were isolated and far away from hospitals. In addition, the prioritization may also be traced to the disruption caused to THP’s program, as explored in section 5.2.

THP’s global framework for action in response to COVID-19 further describes this priority and links directly to subsequent policy development. The first three points in the framework involve spreading awareness of COVID-19 safety, ensuring hygiene and sanitation access, and assisting in isolation and care of symptomatic individuals (The Hunger Project, 2021a). The key observation noted throughout respondents was the focus on disseminating correct information to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In Mexico, respondents noted that government-based information about the pandemic was only transmitted in Spanish, and thus respondent 4 commented that “it was...really important for [them] to share official information but in local languages,” to dispel myths about the disease in communities where many did not speak Spanish. A similar response was noted in Uganda, through “trying to calm down the fears” (respondent 5).

The implementation of these policies followed a combination of new tools, but were also informed by the critical antecedent (Slater & Simmons, 2010). In a more immediate response to the spread of COVID-19, THP shifted almost every part of its programs to be virtual, conducted through mobile communications. For example, one respondent emphasized how the household survey that would typically be done in person had shifted to be conducted via cellphone (respondent 3). Particularly relating to spreading information about COVID-19,

several respondents emphasized the use of WhatsApp to distribute written, audio, and video messages to inform individuals across regions, both those who were literary and those who were not to address the issue pointed out by respondent 4, in which government information was inaccessible. Mobile technology-based implementation was combined with the mobilization of women who had already been involved in THP’s programs. In India, one feature was the training of 8,000 elected women and 52,248 girls to distribute these messages via WhatsApp and text message. Similar efforts were also noted in Sub-Saharan Africa, where women community leaders trained by THP created phone trees to rapidly disseminate information to large numbers of people (The Hunger Project Germany, 2021).

As such, the response to primary risks of COVID-19 presented a productive condition for a critical juncture, in which a new problem was combined with a new tool to address it, although mediated by pre-existing policies in promoting women’s leadership. As such, this further supports Mahoney’s (2000) ascertain that new policies don’t emerge in vacuum, but in combination of what is already present.

5.3.2 Women’s Safety and Security

Pertaining to COVID-19’s secondary effects, women’s safety and security was pointed out as a key priority issue, comprising one of the points in THP’s five point plan, stating “promoting community peace, trust and cohesion” (The Hunger Project Australia, 2019: 3) as a priority, operationalized as seen in figure 3.

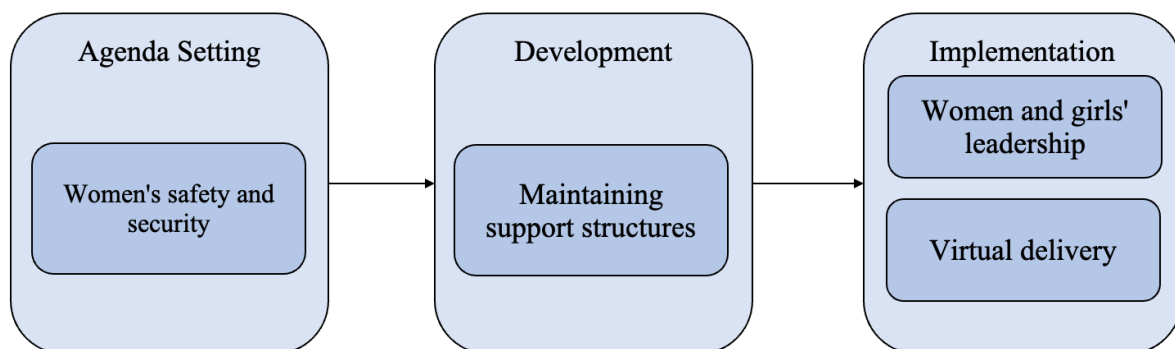


Figure 3: Women’s Safety and Security

The priority of women’s safety and security was further reiterated by respondents across several regions. In India, respondent 1 noted that “within...the first few weeks of the pandemic, [they] realized they have to bring this in very sharply,” into their program, and that “what [they] witnessed was unprecedented.” Such observations were supported by respondents in other geographic areas, who noted that “what was really being felt so much in

the homes was an increase in domestic violence, gender-based violence...geared towards especially the woman,” (respondent 5). Additionally, the violence placed on the agenda was not limited to physical violence, as respondents from Mexico observed that women “were not able to...make decisions,” (respondent 7), and it became a priority to address what these types of violence looked like, and to therefore address these as a priority in the programs. The issue was not entirely new; respondent noted that that it was an issue they’d “always worked on, but has sort of really gathered momentum,” in India, while respondent 7 noted that they had begun conversations on gender-based violence with women in partner communities, but that this had not extended to any form of solidified project prior to COVID-19.

The policy development and implementation in addressing the issue is particularly well illustrated in India. The primary means by which to address GBV was to link women and girls to “government schemes and services”, as well as “keeping an eye out on vulnerable women and children, talking about this” (respondent 1). In implementing these measures, elected women took on further leadership roles to, for example, “advocate for essential services such as helplines, help-desks, increased patrolling, access to medical attention, [and] effective police intervention,” and adolescent girls organized online support groups (The Hunger Project India, 2020: 24).

As such, the response to the gendered impacts of COVID-19 led to a shift in focus towards an existing problem area. The problem was addressed similarly to the primary impacts of COVID-19, mobilizing elected women who already played an important role in THP’s program in India. Furthermore, virtual delivery methods were introduced as a new means by which to deliver these services, but, based on the discussion in section 5.3.1, appear more directly linked to the containment of COVID-19 as a priority. Thus, this indicates the presence of a productive condition to some degree, through the refocusing towards an existing topic.

5.3.3 Livelihoods

Furthermore, livelihoods were identified as a priority. On a global scale, this was denoted as “ensuring relief for those who are most vulnerable,” (The Hunger Project, 2020a). The process by which this was addressed is displayed in figure 4.

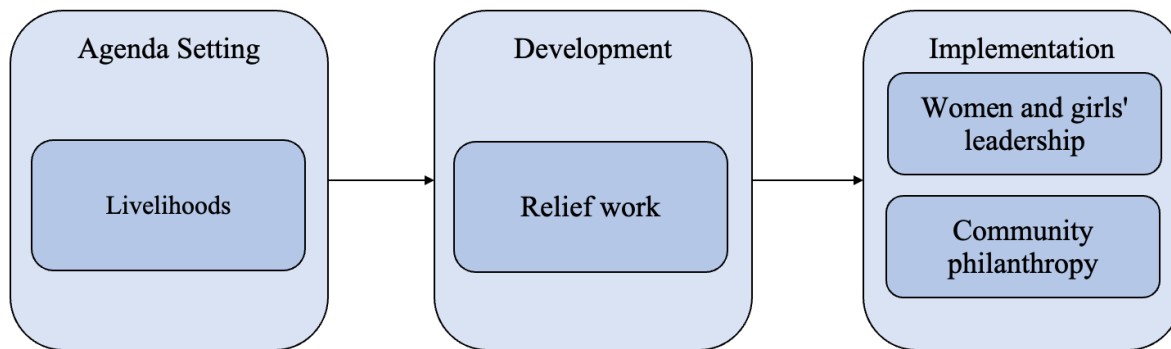


Figure 4: Livelihoods

Like women’s safety, this was not an entirely new issue, but had gained renewed momentum, as respondent 1 noted, “[they] hadn’t really focused on it.” In India, the lockdown created large-scale unemployment, wiping out the only source of livelihood for many of the most vulnerable (including women) who rely on daily wage labor for survival (The Hunger Project India, 2020). A similar experience was further emphasized by respondent 6 in Mexico, who argued that the “main issues were economic.” As mentioned in the permissive condition section, the livelihoods of women were particularly impacted, making this a gendered priority, although not always explicitly referred to as such.

Following identification of the problem, respondent 1 noted the progression into relief work for the first time, which they noted was “not something [they] have ever done, or [they] believe in.” Relief work denoted the distribution of handouts (The Hunger Project India, 2021). Similarly emphasized by respondent 2, they’re “not a relief agency, but when [their] people need something, [they] get it to them.” The evolution into an entirely new type of policy typically at odds with THP’s institutions suggests a productive condition comprising a critical juncture.

Nevertheless, in the implementation phase, a significant mechanism was noted as in the case of women’s safety, involving the mobilization of the women leaders already present in communities and with whom THP was already working. Respondent 2 noted a combination of “community philanthropy and then some degree of...support for emergency relief for those whose livelihoods had been totally devastated.” The women who had received previous leadership training also completed tasks such as monitoring relief and food distribution efforts, and raised funds for their community members (The Hunger Project India, 2020). As such, their existing roles were adapted to include new tasks, expand into new catchment areas. Particularly, they played a role in the relief effort and community

philanthropy. This manifested in a few different ways in various geographies. In India, respondent 1 noted “food distribution” in the form of grains, especially. However, this was emphasized as a “one-time thing” driven by the immediate necessity (The Hunger Project India, 2020: 30). In Mexico, participants noted women community leaders in the existing cooperatives implemented with THP purchasing and distributing food and distributing existing funds from artisanal sales (respondents 4, 6). In Uganda, seed distribution was further noted in context of the planting season coming during lockdown, preventing agricultural workers from accessing these (respondent 5). As such, like women’s safety and security, the focus on livelihoods comprised a renewed momentum for an already existing issue, mainly comprising means already used and mediated by prior institutions.

5.3.4 Summarizing and Initial Conclusions

To summarize the permissive and productive condition, evidence on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 as a critical juncture remains mixed. The primary impacts demonstrate evidence of a permissive condition, in line with Katznelson’s (2003) program staff began questioning the use of its implementation method given the situation. As a result, COVID-19 containment was adopted as a new problem, and a transition to virtual delivery methods as an implementation tool. Changes in these two policy components (Ingram et al., 2007), combined with such shifts in several geographies posit sufficient evidence for a critical juncture and the presence of a productive condition (Soifer, 2009). While virtual methods were also adopted in the context of women’s safety and security, these can be more explicitly traced back to the disruption caused by COVID-19, rather than the gendered impact directly. While recognizing setbacks in its gender equality objectives caused by the pandemic containment measures, the subsequent questioning of existing policies to open for large-scale change did not occur. Rather, trust in existing policies was reaffirmed. A similar pattern was seen in the productive condition mechanism, during which actors noted a shifting in emphasis on existing issues, but subsequent implementation largely through the women leaders trained by THP, expanding their responsibilities but not comprising a new tool. While relief work was noted as a new measure, respondent 1 emphasized this as an exceptional measure, rather than a measure adopted into its regular programs. As such, this indicates that the gendered secondary impacts of COVID-19 do not comprise a critical juncture in THP’s program policy.

5.4 Feedback Mechanisms

Following the definition of predictive and productive conditions for a critical juncture, Soifer (2012) posits that a complete analysis of a critical juncture requires the policy change to be long-lasting beyond the initial critical juncture event. The critical juncture is perceived to end once the initial responses to COVID-19 have been implemented (ibid.). Pierson (2000) posits that this lasting power is created through positive feedback, in which the new policies pursued can better achieve THP's objectives than those previously implemented.

Firstly, one of the initial positive feedback mechanisms was the rapid return of regular programmatic activities following an initial shutdown. As noted in several reports, the organization found that activities resumed relatively quickly (The Hunger Project Germany, 2021; The Hunger Project Switzerland, 2021). This was supported by several respondents who commented that "once people knew about mask-wearing and stuff like that...a lot of the programs returned to continue," (respondent 2), and that there has been "a lot of kind of business as usual," (respondent 3). The rapid return of regular activities is traceable to the identification of COVID-19 as a priority, and subsequent containment measures. However, rather than a critical juncture for new policies, this feedback mechanisms signaled a return to pre-pandemic institutions.

Secondly, the adoption of virtual delivery methods created path dependence through positive feedback mechanisms, but interestingly also through the new challenges it exposed. Several respondents noted that the shift towards virtual delivery methods and the suspension of regular economic activities in communities led to an increased openness towards mobile technology from individuals who had previously rejected such shifts (respondents 4,6,7). Respondent 5 noted how, as markets in Uganda closed, individuals noted that they were able to market their produce online and use social media to sell products (respondent 5). Nevertheless, several respondents also noted the new challenges surrounding technological divides and inequalities in access, which particularly impact women and elderly individuals (respondents 3,4). Given the organization's rural focus, many areas lack internet access and must make long trips to be able to use phones. Furthermore, economic setback meant that many were unable to make the investment into purchasing mobile phones and other equipment needed to remain connected (respondent 3). However, improved attitudes towards technology nevertheless pushed towards a focus on virtual delivery methods and technological capacity building as a more long-term goal for the organization.

Third, the initial suspension of activities, combined with new virtual delivery methods and expanded roles of women in its immediate COVID-19 response, led to an acceleration of self-reliance in several areas, which is one of THP's key issues (The Hunger Project, n.d.-a). As respondent 1 noted, THP's work involves "getting people together" (respondent 1). When this was no longer possible, policy implementation fell on the existing women community leaders and an expansion of their roles, as outlined in the previous section. However, as respondent 5 noted, they had believed that these women leaders only do such work when THP staff is there; however, when forced to withdraw from physical program implementation in the communities, these women ran both COVID-19 response programs and existing programs, progressing towards self-reliance more quickly than had previously been expected. This feedback mechanism as such confirmed an existing path, which was, to some degree, accelerated by the pandemic.

5.5 Outcomes

An essential component of the definition of critical junctures is the notion of an "impact on outcomes later in time," (Capoccia, 2016: 89), reiterating Soifer's (2012) assertion that critical junctures must produce lasting effects. As stated, given the recency of COVID-19, the longer-term impacts pertain to policy changes beyond its immediate responses to the pandemic, which have the potential to become institutionalized within the organization. The outcomes are used to further argue that while the primary impacts of COVID-19 met all criteria for a critical juncture, these could not be traced to its specifically gendered impacts. Regarding the gendered impacts, the prior focus on women was further found to impede a critical juncture.

5.5.1 Primary Impacts of COVID-19

I argue that the primary impacts of COVID-19, and its response in the form of a refocusing on technology meet all criteria for a critical juncture. The visualization of these causal mechanisms in the analytical framework is indicated in figure 5.

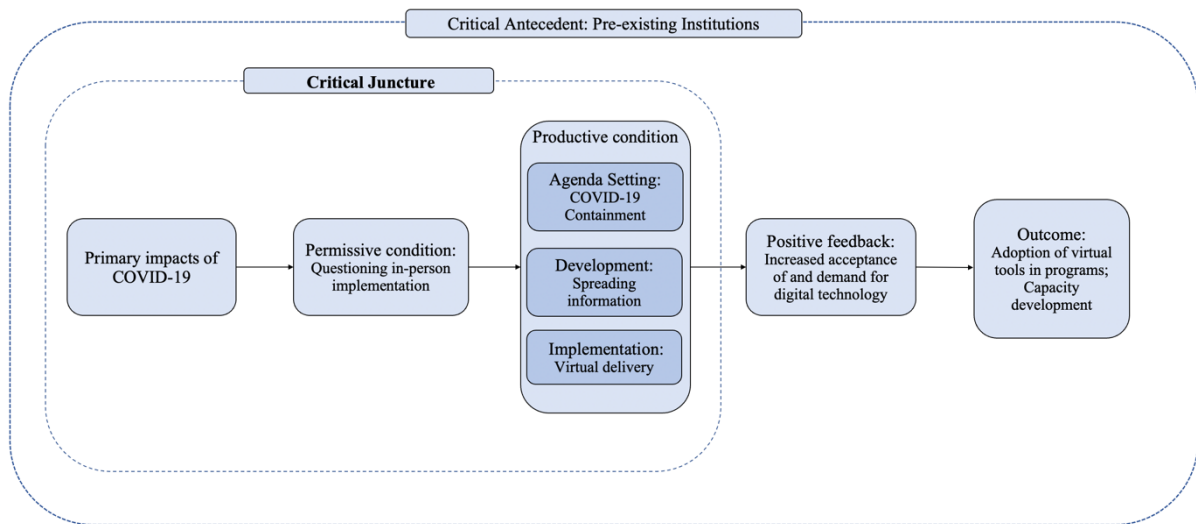


Figure 5: Primary impacts of COVID-19 as a Critical Juncture

Following the disruptive impacts of COVID-19, respondent 1 noted that their programs, which involve “[bringing] people together” were no longer able to serve their purpose due to disruption, creating a permissive condition. In consequence, COVID-19 became a policy priority, particularly spreading information about its containment and the use of virtual methods to deliver these, through the women community leaders that had been trained in THP’s programs. Specifically the use of virtual methods signalled a productive condition, as this was a new policy component (Ingram et al., 2007). The positive feedback impacts of the use of virtual methods, were described as an increased openness to technology within communities; for example, respondent 5 noted how women farmers in Uganda adapted to selling their produce online through WhatsApp, and having it transported to towns on buses, and respondents 6 and 7 from Mexico noted that communities showed greater openness to the use of technology than before.

In consequence of these positive feedback mechanisms, digitization and the use of mobile technology has been adopted throughout multiple components of THP’s programs, noted by several respondents. This shift is in line with the prediction by Twigg (2020), who posited that COVID-19 would accelerate digitalization. On one hand, several respondents emphasized the increased use of technology as a tool in fulfilling and monitoring its program objectives. While this had been previously used for M&E data collection, an increased focus on technology was mentioned in forms of mobile health and mobile banking for cash transfers (respondent 3). As respondent 5 noted, “[they] didn’t realize that there’s a lot more [they] can actually do to stay connected and continue with [their] work,”. However, the adoption of mobile technology in THP’s initial COVID-19 responses also exposed capacity

shortages, making technology itself a policy objective. The benefits of technology use were not equally distributed, and as such several respondents emphasized the weight of technology to better help people harness the benefits of mobile technology (respondent 4, 6, 7); particularly women are less likely to own cell phones and be reached by these measures (respondent 3). For example, in India, THP works with elected women's leadership, and a training of trainers, which had previously always taken place in person, was moved to take place online. They noted that the digital transition set a "new stage", highlighting capacity development needs and adaptation measures (The Hunger Project India, 2020: 30). Similarly, respondents in Mexico noted how it was an opportunity to "be creative" (respondent 6). For example, although not explicitly linked to COVID-19, a recent project in partnership with Bluetown and Microsoft seeks to provide 6,000 women with internet access in Ghana (The Hunger Project Australia, 2021), to address such digital inequalities.

Thus, the disruptive effect of the primary risk of infection with COVID-19 initiated a critical juncture at THP through the adoption of mobile technology throughout its programs. Positive feedback mechanisms related to increased openness to technology use led to longer-term implementation of mobile technology as a tool for achieving its program objectives, but also as a goal, with differential implications for men and women due to existing digital inequalities.

5.5.2 Gendered Secondary Impacts of COVID-19

In contrast to the primary effects, the gendered secondary impacts of COVID-19 do not constitute sufficient change to be considered as initiating a critical juncture. Rather, it maintained its focus on women's leadership; the visualization of this process is seen in figure 6.

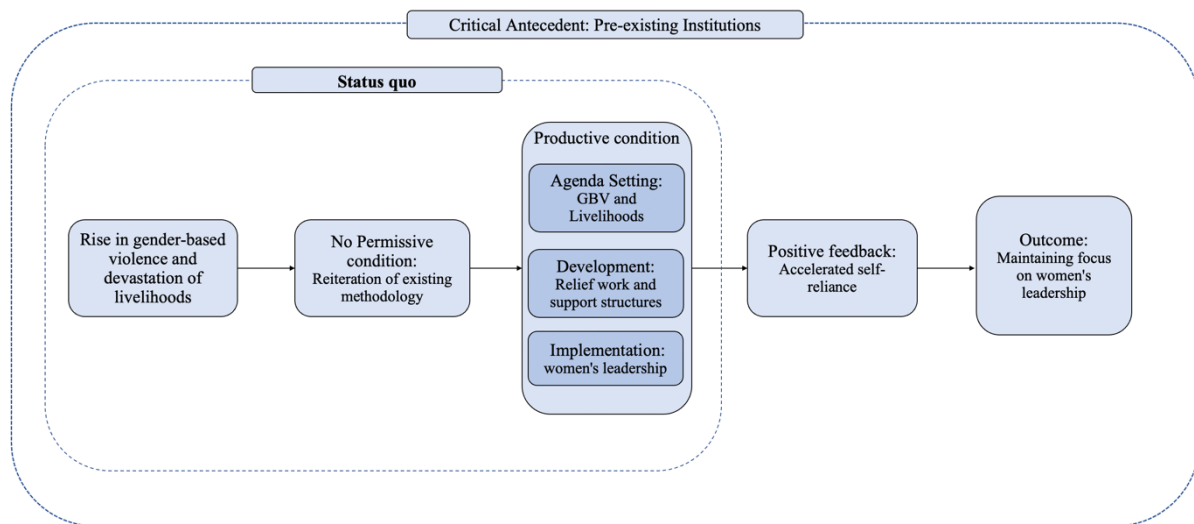


Figure 6: Secondary Impacts of COVID-19 and Maintaining Status Quo

Primarily, the gendered implications of COVID-19 did not display either of the causal mechanisms that Soifer (2012) deems necessary for determining a critical juncture. Rather, respondents described renewed conviction of its method, and its use for mitigating both GBV and the collapse of livelihoods following lockdowns and socioeconomic downturn (respondents 1, 5). These were also maintained as means by which to address these topics in THP’s response to the immediate effects of COVID-19. This focus was further reinforced by the positive feedback mechanisms and accelerating self-reliance. As such, per Soifer’s (2012) framework, the gendered impacts of COVID-19 rather led to a maintenance of the status quo, because it was found to maintain its relevance to achieving the benefits it was created to achieve by influential individuals within the organization.

However, these findings do not entirely comply with the analytical framework, which implies that the so-called “status quo” means maintaining business as normal and does not account for events such as policy acceleration (Hogan et al., 2022). Deeming the gendered impacts of COVID-19 as maintaining the status quo would not be entirely accurate, because positive feedback mechanisms accelerated its existing policy objective of self-reliance (The Hunger Project, n.d.-a). In consequence, although its overall focus on women remained the same, respondents reported being able to expand the scope of THP’s work to include a larger group of stakeholders. As one respondent noted that they “are now in some ways, also...engaging with communities, and not sort of just being limited to engaging with elected representatives,” (respondent 1). They further note that “the core of what [they] do remains...but to sort of engage different stakeholders in the community, and also engage with stakeholders in the communities to demand greater accountability,” (respondent 1). More

specifically, one of the participants emphasizes shifting “energy and resources...into the hands of youth,” (respondent 2), and that they “have not focused nearly enough on the leadership and political involvement of adolescent girls,” (respondent 2). As such, a mechanism may have taken place to allow the acceleration of existing policy, that is possibly traced back to the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and does not comply with Soifer’s (2012) framework.

To summarize, this analysis has been used to argue that while the primary impacts of COVID-19 have constituted a critical juncture for THP’s program policies, this cannot be traced back to the pandemic’s gendered impacts. Rather, the existing gender institutions that guide THP’s work have impeded a critical juncture as they were found to have mediated and mitigated the gendered impacts of COVID-19, and their efficiency was confirmed to the program staff. Nevertheless, the event cannot be clearly deemed as maintaining the “status quo”, as the pandemic’s gendered impacts facilitated the accelerated implication and expansion of existing policies.

5.6 Discussion

Following the findings in the analysis, several considerations pertaining to the theoretical framework and data can be pointed out.

Firstly, the analysis has pointed out shortcomings in the critical juncture framework employed, and how this could have been adjusted to better guide the analysis. As was mentioned in the theoretical framework, there exists disagreement on whether policy acceleration, as was seen in the case of THP, constitutes a critical juncture, in which Hogan et al. (2022) posits that it does not. In adopting Soifer’s (2012) framework this analysis neglected the possibility of path acceleration as a separate event, as this could not be clearly placed within the permissive and productive conditions. Therefore, a valuable addition to the framework may be the addition of such an option, in which the permissive and productive conditions do not occur, but path dependence accelerates the achievement of existing policy objectives and possible expansion of these. A similar extension may also be useful when concerned with judging sufficient divergence for a critical juncture, pertaining to whether increasing the focus on an already existing activity may constitute such a change. The criteria used in this thesis required the adoption of new goals in at least two geographic areas, and although findings and themes were consistent across countries, changes isolated to one area nevertheless may create a significant change that would have been lost in this study.

Furthermore, the analytical framework may have caused disregard for policy change that may be significant but could not easily fit into its pre-determined mechanisms. For example, respondents in Mexico mentioned that they had not extensively focused on gender-based violence before COVID-19 to the extent of formalizing it in a project, but that they had recently implemented a project to address gender-based violence and child marriage (respondents 4, 6, 7). While respondents in Mexico noted gender-based violence as an early impact of COVID-19, it appears this project was not implemented until significantly later and as such difficult to trace given the constraints of the framework.

Furthermore, the focus on community-led development (CLD) introduced challenges and possible weaknesses in the data collected. Mainly, it was at times unclear whether the policy actions had been implemented by THP or by the partner communities directly. For example, in noting the mobilization of women community leaders in community philanthropy actions, respondent 2 commented that “community leaders are always the first responders in a crisis,”. Furthermore, the focus on CLD, and the notion that it is community members who decide on goals and objectives (Torjman & Makhoul, 2012), implies that these also play an important role in contributing to program policy and would ideally have been included in the study. However, time and resource constraints, as well as some of the technology limitations previously mentioned, impeded these types of interviews.

The limitations of both the theoretical and analytical concepts employed in this thesis, as well as the data collected, create valuable lenses for future research, which are further discussed in section 6.1.

6 Conclusion

To recall, this thesis aimed to answer three research questions:

1. *To what extent have the perceived secondary gendered impacts of COVID-19 initiated a critical juncture in The Hunger Project's program policy?*
2. *Has the prior focus on women's empowerment at The Hunger Project facilitated the potential of the gendered impacts of COVID-19 as a critical juncture?*
3. *To what extent can changes in The Hunger Project's program policy be traced back to the gendered secondary impacts of COVID-19?*

Based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews with program staff at THP, as well as a document analysis, this thesis has argued the secondary gendered impacts of COVID-19 cannot be considered a critical juncture for program policy, insofar that they did not meet the criteria set out by the analytical framework. Rather, its pre-existing focus on community-led women's empowerment impeded a critical juncture, as it was shown to be highly useful to address these impacts. Nevertheless, the primary impacts of COVID-19 have created a critical juncture through a focus on mobile technology as both an objective and tool. However, these results cannot be explicitly traced back specifically to the gendered impacts of COVID-19.

The conclusions have several implications, regarding policy and otherwise. Firstly, they have contributed an empirical account to the largely speculative impacts of COVID-19 on international development cooperation, as pointed out by Twigg (2020). Furthermore, they highlight and support the findings by Harman (2016) on the importance of the inclusion of women into responses to disease outbreaks to mitigate its impacts, but also the key aspect of gender mainstreaming in building resilience to the gendered impacts of these. Third, the thesis has contributed to an expansion of historical institutionalism into a new domain, the future possibilities of which are discussed below.

6.1 Future Research

This thesis opens for the possibility of a multitude of research endeavors, based on themes identified in research that were beyond the scope of analysis of this thesis, as well as shortcomings identified.

Firstly, as was identified in the literature review and theoretical framework, the theoretical assumption of crises as critical junctures has not been studied in the medium of NGOs, which

became one of the gaps that this thesis has sought to fill. While this thesis has drawn conclusions on COVID-19 as a critical juncture in the case of THP, the case study nature of this research does not make it transferable to other NGOs. As such, to better understand whether COVID-19 has led to the change in international development that Oldekop et al. (2020) and Hulme and Horner (2021) call for, similar case study research of other development actors is necessary. Such research could further allow researchers to identify patterns across actors to draw more general conclusions about the transformative capabilities of COVID-19.

Secondly, this thesis proposed an adapted framework of Soifer's (2012) conceptualization of critical junctures, drawing on public policy processes proposed by Najam (2000). This analysis has also exposed the shortcomings of the framework, for example through the difficulty of dividing empirical material along the theoretically defined steps of the policy process. While a study of exact policy processes at THP specifically, or NGOs in general, was far beyond the scope of analysis for this study, this highlights the need for such scholarship. Given the increasing acknowledgement of NGOs as actors in a variety of disciplines, such scholarship could prove useful to a number of areas (Yanacopulos, 2019).

Lastly, as mentioned, this thesis has been limited to program policies at THP. During the data analysis process, inductive coding identified patterns related to several policy areas beyond the scope of analysis at hand. One of the major themes was the expansion of advocacy following the pandemic, particularly related to community-led development. As was speculated by both Twigg (2020) and Green (2020), these appeared to originate from the pandemic as foreign professionals were pulled out of program areas. As such, a more definite analysis of these measures could provide valuable contribution to other longer-term impacts of COVID-19.

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8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Interviewees

<i>Number</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Time spent at THP</i>
P1	India	Female	3 years
P2	Global office	Male	45 years
P3	Global office	Female	5 years
P4	Mexico	Female	4 years
P5	Uganda	Female	5 years
P6	Mexico	Female	10 years
P7	Mexico	Female	3 years
P8	Sweden	Female	3 years

Note: some respondents had left The Hunger Project and then returned to the organization. In these cases, the time spent at THP denotes their current employment.

8.2 Appendix 2: Interview Guide

<i>Warm-up questions</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How long have you worked at The Hunger Project?2. What is your position at The Hunger Project?3. What are the main tasks that you work on?
<i>Gender at The Hunger Project</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. How does The Hunger Project work with gender-related issues? <i>Probe:</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Integration into programs and strategy?b. Women's participation?5. How do you personally work with gender-related issues in your position at The Hunger Project?
<i>Initial Impacts of and Responses to COVID-19</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Did you see any impacts of COVID-19 in program areas when the pandemic began? <i>Probe:</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Direct impacts of COVID-19, for example, when did COVID-19 reach program areas?b. Impacts of COVID-19 responses, for example, were there social distancing measures put in place? How did these affect the local populations?c. How these impacts were communicated, for example, how were you informed about the events of COVID-19 in program areas?7. Did you see any gender-specific impacts of COVID-19 in the program areas? If so, what kind of impacts? <i>Probe:</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Direct impacts of COVID-19, were women and girls more severely affected by COVID-19?b. Impacts of COVID-19 containment measures, was there an increase in gender-based violence? Were girls more impacted by school closures?8. How did The Hunger Project initially respond to COVID-19 in its program areas?9. How did The Hunger Project initially respond to gender-specific impacts of COVID-19? <i>Probe:</i><ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Did you experience changes in how you worked with program areas?b. Were there any new projects or programs approved?c. Were there any key people involved in the initial response to COVID-19 and its gendered impacts?10. Do you think that The Hunger Project's focus on putting women first impacted the initial response to COVID-19?
<i>Longer-Term Responses to COVID-19</i>

11. How would you say that your work to empower women during COVID-19 has evolved throughout the pandemic?
12. How are you working with COVID-19 and women's empowerment now?
Probe:
 - a. Are any of the measures that were initially put in place at the beginning of pandemic still running?
 - b. Were there new projects introduced at later stages during the pandemic?
13. Has the COVID-19 pandemic had any positive impacts on The Hunger Project's work?

Possible Impacts in the Future

14. Do you think that the COVID-19 pandemic will have any lasting impact on how The Hunger Project works with gender-related issues?
15. What would you say is the biggest lesson that you learned in your work with gender-related issues during COVID-19?

8.3 Appendix 3: Secondary Material

Appendix 3.1 Annual Reports

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Original Title</i>	<i>English Title</i>
Australia	2020	Annual Report 2019	Annual Report 2019
Australia	2019	Annual Report 2018	Annual Report 2018
Germany	2021	Jahresbericht 2020	Annual Report 2020
India	2021	Annual Report 2020/2021	Annual Report 2020/2021
Switzerland	2021	Jahresbericht 2020	Annual Report 2020
Global	2021	Annual Report 2020	Annual Report 2020
Global	2020	Annual Report 2019	Annual Report 2019
Global	2019	Annual Report 2018	Annual Report 2018

Appendix 3.2 Strategy and Policy Documents

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>
Global	2021	Gender Policy
Global	2021	Mobilizing Women's Leadership for Transformative Change
India	2020	COVID-19 Response: Elected Women & Partners on The Frontlines: Leadership in The Times of Crisis

Appendix 3.3 Press Releases

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>English Title</i>
Australia	2022	Bringing 6,000 Women Online in Rural Ghana
Australia	2020	Animators Rise To The COVID-19 Challenge
Global	2021	We Stand with India
Global	2021	Community Responses to COVID-19

8.4 Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form

Thesis: *Emerging Stronger from the Crisis? The Gendered Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic as a Critical Juncture for NGO Development Policy*

Researcher:

Carolina Ernst

Master's student in International Development and Management, Lund University

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Aim:

The aim of the research is to investigate *the extent to which the gendered impacts of COVID-19 can be considered a critical juncture for NGO Development policy*. Using The Hunger Project as a case study, I seek to investigate how the gendered effects of COVID-19 have impacted policies and programs, and factors mediating these changes.

Data will be collected through documents and semi-structured interviews with employees in relevant positions at The Hunger Project. I am thus inviting you to participate in an interview, which will last approximately 45 minutes and will be conducted over Zoom. The audio of the interview will be recorded and transcribed. The interview will cover topics including the gendered impacts of COVID-19 in program areas, initial responses, and longer-term consequences of the pandemic for the organization's work.

Confidentiality:

The data collected will only be used for the researcher's (Carolina Ernst) master's thesis, which will be submitted to Lund University in May 2022 and published on the Lund University Publications webpage (<https://lup.lub.lu.se/search/>).

To ensure confidentiality, your identity will only be known to the researcher. Each participant will be assigned a code, which will be used for all recordings, notes, and quotations in the thesis. Furthermore, any details that may reveal a participant's identity will be removed. To contextualize the data, the thesis will mention what countries the participants work in.

The interview recordings and transcripts will be securely stored on a password-protected computer, and the recording will be destroyed upon confirmation of the thesis outcome. The transcripts will be retained for one year after submission of the thesis. Participants may access the information they have provided at any time in this period by contacting the researcher.

Participation:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and participants may choose to withdraw at any time, without providing a reason and without any negative consequences. Participants may also decline to answer all questions and withdraw their responses after completion of the interview. Responses can be withdrawn until May 1st, 2022.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation in the study, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher using the details provided.

Verbal consent will be requested and recorded at the beginning of the interview.

By verbally consenting to participate in the beginning of the interview I agree that:

- I have read the participant consent form and have been able to ask questions about the study.
- I voluntarily participate in this study and understand that I can withdraw at any time and without providing a reason.
- I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.
- The interview will be recorded and transcribed.
- Anonymized quotations and statements from my interview may be used in the thesis and the presentation thereof.
- Interview recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer only accessible by Carolina Ernst and destroyed upon confirmation of the thesis results.
- Interview transcripts will be stored on a password-protected computer only accessibly by Carolina Ernst and destroyed one year after submission of the thesis.
- I can request a copy of the interview transcript at any time to verify any information that I have provided.
- I can contact Carolina Ernst at any time for further information or clarification.

I, the researcher, promise to follow the conditions outlined above:

Researcher's Signature

Date

8.5 Appendix 5: Codebook

Theme/Code	Files	References
Critical Antecedent: Pre-Existing Institutions		
Patriarchal structures at the root of hunger and poverty	7	16
Multisectoral focus with women at the core	13	27
Women-focused Community-Led Development	6	20
Elected women in India	8	26
Indigenous women in Latin America	3	5
Women community leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa	6	11
Permissive Condition: Perceptions of COVID-19		
Challenges to Policy implementation	5	11
Confirmation of pre-existing policies	8	19
Setback in THP's Goals	8	13
Food insecurity	6	7
Gender-based violence	10	32
Livelihoods and economic activity	6	10
Productive Condition: Agenda Setting		
COVID-19 Containment	9	18
Livelihoods	6	11
Women's rights and safety	7	14
Productive Condition: Policy Development		
Maintaining support structures for women and girls	4	6
Preventing misinformation	9	22
Relief work	7	14
Productive Condition: Policy Implementation		
Community Philanthropy	5	8

Expanding and leveraging women's leadership	17	63
Food & hygiene equipment distribution	11	20
Virtual implementation	10	22
Positive Feedback		
Acceleration of self-reliance	3	17
Adoption of technology and new challenges	6	32
Rapid return of regular service delivery	8	15
Outcomes		
Expanded focus on women stakeholders	3	11
Expanded focus on technology	6	13
Maintaining community-led development	4	12
Expanding women's safety and security	2	11