



Advancing gender equity in ICT4D through a lens of care: a case study of Ethiopia through a care-based evaluative approach

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Abstract

There is increasing momentum across the Global South to use digital technologies to drive economic development and advance the Sustainable Development Goals. Digital tools can transform economies, create jobs, and improve communication, yet their relationship with gendered caring responsibilities remains underexplored. Because women disproportionately bear the burden of care, their capacity to engage with ICTs is restricted, shaping how ICT4D influences their opportunities and freedoms. This thesis investigates how a care-based evaluative approach can promote gender equity in ICT4D by asking: *'How can care be developed as a theoretical lens to understand and evaluate the gendered impacts of ICT4D?'*

Adopting a critical feminist methodology, this thesis combines policy analysis, semi-structured interviews with informal women workers, and theoretical development of a novel evaluative approach. Ethiopia provides the exploratory case study, as it is liberalising its telecommunications sector while prioritising gender equality in ICT4D.

Findings, presented across three papers, demonstrate that: 1) digital policies rarely address the sociocultural roots of the digital gender divide, but incorporating caring principles into policy design offers an alternative pathway; 2) care is a fundamental yet overlooked dimension of ICT4D; and 3) an evaluative framework grounded in the feminist ethic of care is uniquely suited to capture ICT4D's gendered impacts.

The thesis proposes a 'Care Approach' to evaluation, recognising relational and care-based effects often invisible in existing frameworks. For example, ICTs may enable informal women workers to provide and receive care across distances, while simultaneously limiting their ability to fully recognise others' needs due to mediated

communications. By centring care and relationality, ICT4D can be evaluated more holistically, revealing both its enabling and constraining effects. This lens contributes to deeper understandings of how ICT4D shapes gender equity, moving beyond access metrics to consider lived, relational impacts.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research rationale

Information and communication technologies (ICTs¹) play an important role in tackling many of the biggest challenges facing the world today, including inequality, climate action, and access to quality education (Andersson & Hatakka, 2023). This role has grown significantly from initially helping administrative functions in the public sector in the 1960s when ICTs were relatively scarce, to being integrated in national and international development systems as they become nearly universal as they are now (Walsham, 2017). ICTs are also enabling access to emerging benefits from the current artificial intelligence revolution, such as applications in smart agriculture (Wall et al., 2021). Mobile telephony reflects this evolution, particularly when compared to access to basic sanitation services. Between 2000 and 2015, global mobile phone subscription rates rose from 12% to 97%, while access to basic sanitation services increased only from 58% to 68% (Riccardi, 2019). Although reliable data on mobile phone ownership in 2000 are limited, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) estimates ownership to have reached 82% globally by 2025 (ITU, 2025).

The growth of ICTs in the pursuit of development goals, has occurred in front of a background of increasing focus on and understanding of gender in development, evinced through MDG 3 and now SDG 5: 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.' Arising from the recognition that women were being marginalised in development processes, the 'women in development' paradigm formed in the 1970s

¹ ICTs refer to digital ICTs like smartphones, laptops and computers which apply knowledge to process or communicate data (Heeks, 2017). This will be expanded upon in the literature review chapter.

to encourage a consideration of women's issues in development processes. As the understanding of women's place in development progressed, the approach shifted to the current, more holistic view of 'gender and development' which is concerned with how women and men are assigned roles, expectations and responsibilities by society (Miller & Razavi, 1995). Such a perspective within the ICTs for development² (ICT4D³) context is crucial because the socially and culturally constructed roles played by most women and men lead to phenomena like the digital gender divide which skew development outcomes (Herbert, 2017; Ponge, 2016; Tyers, 2020).

The causes of the digital gender divide are well understood, yet research proposing ways to bridge this divide has been less impactful. The research has concentrated, firstly, on policymaking and particularly the recognition of gender in policies, as Acilar and Sæbø (2023) found in their review of the literature. Despite these recommendations, government initiatives have not been overly successful in closing the divide as they often fail to consider the broader social and cultural context into which policies are embedded (Acilar & Sæbø, 2023; Singh, 2017). Research highlights the importance of collaboration between governments, non-governmental organisations, and international women's organisations in closing the divide. Bala and Singhal (2018), David (2022), and Phillips et al. (2021) emphasise the need for diverse stakeholders to be involved in programmes that not only teach digital skills but also aim to challenge and transform societal and cultural norms. This is difficult, however, as marginalised groups are often excluded from discussions as they are seen as low-

² Development is here framed through the Capabilities Approach and defined as the "process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy" as well as "the removal of major sources of unfreedom" such as systemic social deprivation, tyranny and poverty (Sen, 2001). This will be expanded upon in the literature review chapter.

³ ICT4D is thus conceptualised as the use of digital ICTs, like mobile phones, to expand the real freedoms that people enjoy and remove major sources of unfreedom. This will be further explained in the literature review chapter.

priority groups and become an afterthought if not included from the outset of processes (Phillips et al., 2021). Similarly, these recommendations struggle to lead to tangible long-term impacts in bridging the digital gender divide unless they address the root causes of the divide such as social and cultural norms.

The evaluation of policies and programmes is also important because this frames how we understand the interrelation between ICT4D and gender, including how they affect the digital gender divide. There exists an intimate relationship between policy and evaluation as each informs the other: most simply, policy informs the direction of development and consequently what evaluation seeks to measure, while evaluation assesses whether policies and programmes have been effective in achieving their goals and hence the formulation of policy (Cameron et al., 2016). The dominant evaluation paradigm is focused on accountability towards the donor, using Global North epistemologies and an emphasis on financial effectiveness and efficiency to measure impact despite a wealth of approaches available (FCDO, 2023; UNEG, 2016; USAID, 2020). This leads to a general appreciation but neglect of complexity and unintended outcomes, a bias for experimental methods, and a lack of appropriate evaluative capacity (Dighe & Sarode, 2019); these are particularly relevant in the Global South where systems and institutions are more unstable and fragile, vulnerabilities are heightened, and contexts are less predictable (Ofir, 2013). Evaluative approaches are consequently poorly positioned to be equity-focused and responsive to both complexity and gender–key issues which Bamberger et al. (2017) outline need to be recognised to fully evaluate programmes. They thus struggle to play their role in helping judge the effectiveness of programmes in a way accountable to all stakeholders and may even further entrench existing power structures.

With the persistent challenges in closing the digital gender divide, it may be time for a new approach to ICT4D—one that not only centres the perspectives of women but is also theoretically grounded in the structural sources of their marginalisation. In this thesis, I propose care as a starting point for rethinking ICT4D. As a key cultural role disproportionately assigned to women, care often restricts their access to and use of digital technologies. At the same time, care represents a well-established feminist field of inquiry with its own values and conceptual tools, which have been used to reimagine societal norms, hierarchies of power, and policy processes (Bourgault, 2020; FitzGerald, 2020; Greenswag, 2019). This chapter introduces the relevance of care to the intersection of ICT4D and gender, before outlining how the thesis builds its argument. I begin by presenting the guiding research questions, linking them to key gaps in the literature, and explaining their role in shaping the thesis narrative. I then describe the research context, justifying the use of Ethiopia as a case study due to its explicit commitments to both ICT4D and gender equality. Finally, I outline the structure of the thesis to show how the argument develops across the chapters.

1.2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this thesis have been designed to justify and develop care as a theoretical lens to capture the gendered impacts of ICT4D—the central aim of this thesis. Guiding this exploration is the overarching research question *‘How can care be developed as a theoretical lens to understand and evaluate the gendered impacts of ICT4D?’* In addressing this question, I will: 1) problematise ICT4D policy as insufficiently attentive to the sociocultural foundations of the digital gender divide, particularly women’s caring responsibilities, which limits its capacity to close that

divide; 2) demonstrate the relationship between ICT4D and care, establishing care as a critical pathway through which ICT4D impacts are shaped and experienced; and 3) present an evaluative approach based on these insights to use care as a lens for capturing the complex, equity-oriented, and gendered dimensions of ICT4D. Developing a theoretical lens is significant not only because it shapes the researcher's approach and interpretation of findings (Waldt, 2024), but also because it can influence the broader field. For example, Qureshi (2019) demonstrates that viewing development through economic, social, or human development lenses can lead to differing interpretations of what development entails. By establishing care as a theoretical lens, this thesis contributes a framework that can be applied by future researchers—marking a potentially important impact of this work.

My first objective is to evaluate how gendered issues and power structures are captured in ICT4D policy, arguing that policy is not well positioned to close the digital gender divide despite its recognition of gender and the gendered nature of ICT4D. In pursuing this objective through a critical feminist policy analysis, I problematise and set the stage of inquiry by examining how gender is considered in ICT4D policy. Most literature which has focused on the intersection of gender and ICT4D policy has sought to understand how gender is constructed in these policies and how they are expected to impact genders differently (Makoza, 2022). This has left a dearth of literature examining how ICT4D policies address context-specific root causes of the digital gender divide as well as gendered systems of oppression; thus, the policy analysis literature broadly fails to recognise many of the structural barriers women face and offers solutions which do not account for the sociocultural norms, roles and expectations which limit women's engagement with ICTs in the first place. Answering this question to fill this gap will generate appropriate guidance for policymakers

considering gender in ICT4D policy, and will strengthen our understanding of key cultural barriers women face to engaging with ICTs which are not considered in ICT4D policies, such as their role as carers.

I approach my second objective, to argue that care is a critical but under-theorised component of ICT4D, through a qualitative study of the relational benefits of mobile phones. There are diverse literatures exploring the dyadic relationships between care⁴, ICTs, and development, but none explicitly explores how the impact of ICTs on people's engagement with care can inform development outcomes. Such a consideration is important because the relational nature of care suggests that the impacts of ICTs extend beyond just those who actively use them. In studying this relationship through qualitative research with informal women workers in Ethiopia, I demonstrate how care acts as a pathway within ICT4D, arguing that care be adopted as a lens through which the impacts of ICT4D can be more fully evaluated.

Finally, I use theoretical development to address my third objective of creating a new way to measure the impact of care in ICT4D. Bamberger et al. (2017, p. 75) note that "new evaluation approaches that are "complexity-responsive" and equity-focused and gender responsive" are required as development initiatives become more complex. Drawing from care theory, I adapt the feminist ethic of care perspective to develop an evaluative approach well-suited for capturing complexity through its relational focus, addressing issues of gender and equity due to the gendered nature of care, and the entanglement of the private and public spheres of life. This addresses many of the shortcomings of evaluation in the Global South relevant to ICT4D

⁴ Care is broadly defined as the ways in which we "maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our environments, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex life-sustaining web" (Tronto, 1993). This will be expanded upon in the literature review chapter.

including a lack of evaluative capacity, the bias towards experimental methods, the neglect of complexity and unintended outcomes, and a focus on accountability towards the donor rather than communities (Dighe & Sarode, 2019). In answering this final question, I will have presented the final aspects of my argument supporting the use of care as a theoretical lens for exploring the gendered impacts of ICT4D.

1.3. Research Context

I use an exploratory case study research strategy to explore how gender is considered in ICT4D and how care can be used as a theoretical lens to inform the gendered impacts of ICT4D. This research strategy allows for an in-depth empirical exploration of these phenomena in their real-life context (Yin, 2009) which is particularly salient given the need to understand local contextual and cultural factors linked to gender roles as well as the cultural nature of care (Raghuram, 2016). In doing so, it was appropriate for addressing the first two objectives of the thesis, which provided a foundation for fulfilling the third objective.

Ethiopia was selected as the case study because the government of Ethiopia has emphasised both ICTs and gender equality in their development processes. The Ethiopian government's pursuit of ICT4D began meaningfully in 2009 when they ratified their first ICT strategy, although this was seemingly in response to an international push from the global community to take advantage of ICTs for development through the 2003 and 2005 World Summits on Information Society which urged nations to draft e-strategies and ICT policies (Mammo, 2016). Since then, ICTs have grown as part of their development strategy through the use of technology parks to facilitate investment in IT-related activities in Ethiopia, echoing China's digital transformation strategy, and export-led industrialisation focused on the manufacturing

sector and its links with agriculture (Tesfachew, 2022). These developments have taken place alongside the proposed liberalisation of the telecommunications sector and the introduction of a subsidy scheme targeting vulnerable populations, both intended to accelerate the ICT4D process in a more equitable manner (GoE, 2020a). These strategies reflect the government's aspiration to catch up with Kenya, a leading example of rapid digital transformation, by 2025 (Tesfachew, 2022).

The apparent push for gender equality forms an integral part of this equitable ICT4D process the government is pursuing. The Ethiopian government's most recent development plan, the Ten Years Development Plan: a Pathway to Prosperity 2021-2030, aims to "enable [women] to benefit from economic development, capacity building, and equitable participation" (GoE, 2020b), highlighting how empowering women can contribute to development. This builds upon a longer-term political drive for gender equality—which led to mixed results for women between 2000-2016, (UNICEF, 2020)—reflected through the Constitution solidifying a host of women's rights and outlining that gender issues be integrated into national policies (FDRE, 1995), and Ethiopia's status as a signatory of leading international and regional frameworks promoting gender equality such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Drucza et al., 2020). Women's engagement with development has primarily occurred through the promotion of the historically women-dominated manufacturing industry (Abebe et al., 2020; Dinh et al., 2012; Tejani, 2011) which, despite employing many women, many of whom are vulnerable (Amdeselassie et al., 2020), arguably exploits them by providing them low wages and poor housing conditions (Dercon et al., 2019).

The paradoxical engagement of women in the development process, where they are simultaneously empowered through employment and exploited for their

labour, appears to be a symptom of the government's broader attitudes toward women and gender. Bekana (2020), for example, noted that current development policies merely integrate gender equality issues into an existing policy direction which emphasises economic outcomes, namely poverty reduction and job creation. Some women activists see this as "little more than a token gesture towards the consideration of women" (Bekana, 2020) because women are systematically disadvantaged in representing their views and deliberating while participating in the policy process (Holdo, 2015) and because Ethiopia's political leaders don't support women's participation in decision-making (Dessie, 2021).

The promotion of women in development, therefore, appears to primarily be to appease foreign donors. Since the early 1990s, Western governments and aid agencies have linked their foreign aid monies to conditions regarding democracy, good governance, and the protection of basic human rights (Crawford & Kacarska, 2019; Swedlund, 2017), including the promotion of gender equality (Olivié, 2022). This has left Ethiopia beholden to donors lest their aid be suspended, like it was from the European Union during the war in Tigray where Human Rights Watch (2022) found evidence of widespread human rights violations, the use of sexual violence as a weapon, and killing and concentration camps based on ethnicity (Chadwick, 2022). The development of Digital Ethiopia 2025 evidences this dynamic where, according to a source involved in developing the policy (Anonymous, 2022), Melinda Gates emphasised gender through her role as a commissioner of the policy and yet the push to recognise the gendered dimensions of ICT4D in the policy process was not wholly accepted by the Ethiopian government.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is broken into six chapters, as shown in Figure 1. In this **first introductory chapter**, I have discussed why this research is relevant (1.1) as well as how I have approached this research, introducing my three research questions to develop my argument (1.2), including justifying Ethiopia as a case study for my research strategy (1.3), and, now, how my thesis is structured to provide a more in-depth preview into the structure of my argument. In **Chapter 2**, I critically review the relevant literatures and identify their gaps, firstly reviewing ICT4D literature to define ICT4D and review its relationship with the digital gender divide. In doing so, I identify a gap in which policy analysis literature fails to appropriately recognise the sociocultural barriers which underlie gendered impacts of ICT4D. I then review care literature to firstly define care and subsequently explore its respective relationships with development and ICTs, ultimately identifying a gap in which the holistic relationship between ICTs, care and development has been left unexplored. I finally examine the evaluation literature, discussing the many purposes and definitions of evaluation before highlighting the shortcomings of evaluation in the Global South and debates around the ethical dimensions of evaluation. I subsequently introduce the feminist ethic of care as a means of contributing to the shortage of evaluation approaches appropriate for the Global South.

In line with the requirements for the MLitt degree, no methodology chapter is included in the body of the thesis. I have included a methodology chapter which is unedited and has no references in the appendix however for your background and to reflect my progress when I was transferred to the MLitt. In my methodology section (**Appendix A**), I outline and justify my methodological choices including the use of a critical feminist policy analysis methodology to address research question 1, how I

worked with Ethiopian researchers to conduct qualitative research to answer the second research question, and the use of theoretical development methods to answer research question 3.

Chapters 3-5 consist of the journal papers which each address a research question. In **Chapter 3**, I present the findings of my critical feminist policy analysis of the Ethiopian government's ICT4D policies, specifically analysing how their ICT4D policies consider gender and gendered issues in addition to how they capture the causes of the digital gender divide. In **Chapter 4** I present empirical evidence for the role of care as a mediating variable in the ICT4D process. I build upon this evidence by introducing the significance of evaluation as a means of capturing the role of care in development impacts and explaining that the dominant development evaluation paradigm is poorly positioned to capture these. In **Chapter 5**, I develop the 'Care Approach' to evaluation by drawing from the feminist ethic of care as well as feminist and responsive evaluation. In doing so, I propose an approach which addresses many of the shortcomings of the dominant development evaluation paradigm and which can capture the gendered impacts of ICT4D through the principles of care.

I end the thesis through a concluding discussion in **chapter 6** which draws together the overall narrative of the thesis by highlighting key findings and outlining how these can inform the gendered impacts of ICT4D to address the overarching research aim. I will also summarise the key contributions of the research, provide important context by recognising the limitations of the research, and suggest avenues for further research.

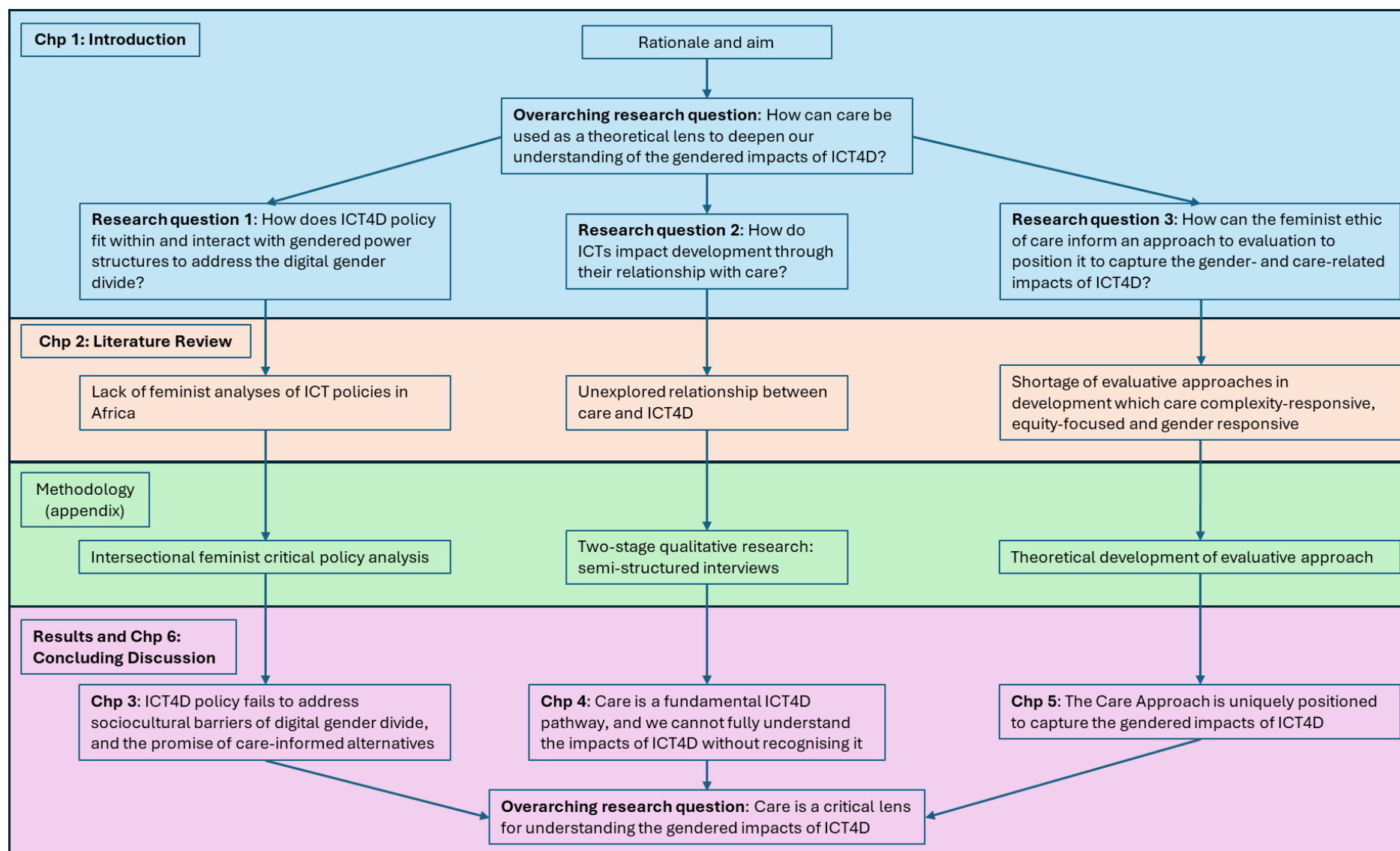


Figure 1. How the thesis structure addresses the overarching research question

2. Literature Review

This literature review chapter introduces the key topics of the thesis and explains their significance, evaluates existing literature with reference to the thesis, and identifies the gaps in the literature I fill through this thesis. It begins by introducing the contested concept of digital development/ICT4D and explores important related literature such as the digital gender divide and ICT policy in Africa to argue that the literature has not adequately investigated how ICT4D policies fit within and interact with gendered power structures to address the digital gender divide. It builds on this finding by discussing the care literature, initially describing the widely contested definition of care before exploring how the relationships between care and capabilities, and ICTs and care, are outlined in the literature. In doing so, it argues that the dyadic relationships between ICTs, development and care have been examined in the literature, but that a gap exists regarding how these concepts relate holistically and, more specifically, how ICTs impact development through care with the recognition that care is a gendered phenomenon. Finally, this chapter discusses the evaluation literature, including contested definitions and purposes of evaluation practice and the shortcomings of evaluation in the Global South, as well as key relevant debates such as whether the evaluator should engage in advocacy and the normative dimensions of evaluation. Then, premised on the assertion of Bamberger et al. (2017) that new approaches to evaluation are needed which are responsive to complexity, equity, and gender, it details the feminist ethic of care as a potential normative guide for evaluation which is particularly relevant for capturing the gender- and care-related impacts of ICT4D.

To conduct this literature review, a wide variety of literatures were explored, including development literatures, ICT4D literatures, ethics of care literatures, evaluation literatures, and media literatures. SCOPUS and Search Oxford Libraries Online (SOLO) were the primary databases used; Table 1 presents example search terms I used to guide my review. I evaluated resources according to the following criteria to determine whether to read them more fully: 1) whether the title indicated broad relevance to the topic, 2) whether the abstract indicated the resource is likely to be relevant to the topic, 3) how widely cited the resource is, and 4) when the resource was published (though this was less relevant for long-established foundational concepts such as the Capabilities Approach and the Ethics of Care). Importantly, within articles I read fully, I sometimes used the reference list to identify other articles which warranted further analysis.

Table 1. Selection of example search terms used in conducting the literature review

Field of literature	Example search term
Development	“Capabilities Approach” AND relational OR ontology’, ‘external capabilities’,
ICT4D	‘ICT4D AND history’, “digital development” AND theory’
Ethics of care	“Ethics of care” AND femin*, ‘care AND defin* AND debates OR review’
Evaluation	‘Car* AND evaluation’, “feminist evaluation”, “evaluation AND “global south” OR development’
Media	‘Car* AND technology OR ICTs OR media’, ‘parent* OR coparent* AND phone’

2.1. ICT4D

This section begins by justifying why I have chosen to use the contested term ‘information and communication technologies for development’ (ICT4D) to describe the use of digital technologies in development despite some scholars feeling the term is outdated. I then define ICT4D by firstly defining information and communication

technologies (ICTs) as scope 1 digital ICTs and secondly defining development using Sen's Capabilities Approach. From here, I review some of the various conceptualisations of how ICTs relate to capabilities in the literature before proposing the technology-augmented Capabilities Approach by Haenssger and Ariana (2018) to theorise this relationship. I subsequently explore the relationship between the digital gender divide and ICT4D, examining the causes of the divide and how policies can reinforce it. I finish by outlining the lack of feminist policy analyses of digital policies in the Global South as an important gap in the literature because feminist analyses can identify root causes of the gender divide and thus present holistic suggestions for addressing this divide in ICT4D.

2.1.1. Defining ICT4D: the relationship between ICTs and development

ICTs have played an important role in development since the 1960s. Their role has grown from improving the administrative functions of the public sector and supporting the private sector to promote economic growth, to now becoming more targeted in helping alleviate poverty while including the entire economy (Heeks, 2020). Both Walsham (2017) and Heeks (2020), the latter of whom is a leading academic in the ICT4D literature, argue now is a key time in the relationship between ICTs and development because the separation between digital ICTs and development is closing and ICTs are becoming further integrated into national and international development systems. This relationship between ICTs and development has historically been termed ICT4D.

There is debate, however, regarding the term ICT4D and how well it reflects the current use of modern digital technologies in development. ICT4D is associated with

the use of ICTs playing a specialised role in aiding the pursuit of development goals by contributing to many development processes at a surface level and by having a limited societal reach (Heeks, 2020). The evolution of technology and simultaneous increase in accessibility has led to a new paradigm in which technologies have increased in scope, complexity and specialisation within development. This new paradigm is more appropriately termed 'digital development' because this captures the role of digital technologies as a complex and wide-ranging digital nervous system for development to capitalise upon (Krieshok, 2024). Notably, there is some confusion within the field regarding these terms with authors such as Rothe et al. (2023) using the terms interchangeably.

Within this thesis, I will use the term ICT4D for two reasons. Firstly, there is still momentum behind the term ICT4D and I expect it to have continuing relevance in the literature as exemplified through editorials by Andersson and Hatakka (2023) and Masiero (2024) foregrounding special issues exploring how ICTs have impacted the SDGs and the discussion of oppression and liberation implicit in the field respectively. Secondly, the research population of my empirical chapter, informal women workers in Ethiopia, mainly use mobile phones,—specifically brick phones,—the iconic technology of the later stages of ICT4D (Heeks, 2020). I feel this restricts the scope of my research to technologies relevant to ICT4D research rather than the expanded scope of digital development research.

There are two fundamental conceptualisations required when discussing ICT4D: 1) how are ICTs conceptualised? And 2) how is development conceptualised and defined? Regarding the former, Heeks (2017) broadly defines ICTs as “devices or techniques that apply knowledge in order to process or communicate data,” which are broken down into different ‘scopes’: from the most basic non-electronic ICTs like books

and pens (scope 3), to digital ICTs like smartphones, laptops, and the internet (scope 1). This thesis will use the term 'ICTs' to refer to scope 1 digital ICTs because the uptake and impact of these technologies have been central to development since the mid-/late-2000s (Heeks, 2020); for example, these are the technologies in Ethiopia's ICT4D strategy which most significantly affect the daily lives of Ethiopians (GoE, 2020a, 2020b). This also aligns with the broad consensus conceptualisation of ICTs across the ICT4D literature (Kleine, 2013).

The conceptualisation of 'development' in ICT4D has historically been limited as it has been informed more strongly by techno-centric scholars than scholars with a development studies background (Heeks, 2010; Kondowe & Chigona, 2019). Sein et al. (2019) outline that development has historically been viewed through a lens of economic development but that this conceptualisation has been increasingly challenged and thus evolved as the field has become more interdisciplinary (Zheng et al., 2018). Sen's (1974, 1979a, 1979b) Capabilities Approach framework has become increasingly influential in the conceptualisation of development in the field. The Capabilities Approach consists of two key principles: functionings and capabilities. Functionings are an interrelated set of 'beings and doings' which impact an individual's wellbeing, including being educated, getting married, and being well nourished. Sen argues these are a better measure for calculating social welfare than traditional utilitarian indicators. Capabilities are considered as the freedom, or real opportunity, to achieve 'valuable' functionings; this freedom includes not only the freedom to achieve the functioning but also a lack of external factors preventing one from achieving that functioning. For example, Kleine (2010) tells the story of a woman in Chile who was able to virtually visit the German town of Kaiserslautern, a town significant to her through a previous relationship with a pen friend whom she was never

able to afford to visit, by accessing the internet at her local library. In this example, visiting Kaiserslautern virtually was an achieved functioning and, although the woman did not have the capability to visit Kaiserslautern in person, being able to visit virtually is seen as an expanded capability.

While Sen's Capabilities Approach has been highly influential, it is important to note that it has been developed in distinct ways, most notably by Nussbaum (1999, 2000a, 2000b), whose conceptualisations differs in key ways. Nussbaum, firstly, proposes a more prescriptive version of the Capabilities Approach, canvassing a universal list of central human capabilities and arguing that justice requires guaranteeing individuals a minimum threshold level of each, regardless of context (Nussbaum, 2006). This approach emphasises addressing adaptive preferences, in which individuals may come to accept or endorse constrained ways of living because of long-term deprivation or oppression. Sen, contrastingly, resists specifying a fixed list of capabilities, instead aiming to purposefully be incomplete and pluralistic. Sen advocates for an open-ended and context-sensitive evaluative framework that promotes public reasoning, democratic deliberation, and the role of agency in determining which capabilities matter in settings (Sen, 2004). For this thesis, Sen's approach is adopted as it offers greater analytical flexibility for examining how ICTs interact with locally situated social structures, power relations, and forms of agency, and is thus better suited to the empirical and relational concerns that underpin ICT4D research.

The Capabilities Approach has been used in ICT4D studies in a variety of ways. This includes, firstly, through the direct application of the approach such as by Loh and Chib (2019), who drew upon the Capabilities Approach to conceptualise well-being as gaining capabilities for employability in the Singaporean context, and Smith et al.

(2011), who investigated how mobile phones were used to expand users' capabilities with respect to social networks, economic networks, and governance networks. It also includes work by Heeks (2017) and Rothe et al. (2023), who each used the sustainable development goals (SDGs), which are underpinned by the Capabilities Approach, to evaluate ICT4D and to understand inequality in ICT4D respectively.

For this thesis, I will, in line with Sen (2001, p. 4), define development as the “process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” as well as “the removal of major sources of unfreedom” such as systemic social deprivation, tyranny and poverty. Crucial to this definition is the idea of critical agency which involves marginalised people being able to not only critically analyse the root causes of their marginalisation but also that they have the agency to act on and challenge those causes (Drèze & Sen, 2002, p. 233). This recognises that oppressive social structures can be internalized which can lead agency to reinforce and reproduce inequalities (Poveda & Roberts, 2018).

There are various conceptualisations of the role of ICTs within the Capabilities Approach which influence how we analyse the impacts of ICTs in development. Gigler et al. (2014), for example, developed the concept of informational capabilities which centralizes information rather than ICTs within the Approach. This emphasises that ICTs merely improve people's informational capital (their resources which they can transform into information which can then be acted upon) but that their personal conditions, such as informational literacy and communication capability, need to be adequate to turn this information into agency and opportunities to achieve the things they value doing and being. This conceptualisation highlights that there is no direct, causal relationship between ICTs and development; rather that it is a dynamic process between people and ICTs within a given context. Kleine (2010) provided another

conceptualisation of this relationship by developing the 'Choice Framework' which operationalised the Capabilities Approach by incorporating aspects of empowerment and sustainable livelihoods framework. It saw choice as the primary development outcome which was informed by dimensions of choice such as the existence of choice and a sense of choice, individual agency-based inputs like cultural and educational resources, and structures which aid or limit this agency like access to ICTs and local institutions. This approach encourages researchers to move away from cause-and-effect analyses and instead disaggregate the effects of ICTs on development and examine how these effects are interrelated and impact each other.

For the purposes of this thesis, the technology-augmented Capabilities Approach by Haenssger and Ariana (2018) will be used to conceptualise the role of ICTs in the Capabilities Approach. This framework sees ICTs as generative inputs which provide the means to achieving outcomes and as transformative conversion factors which alter the characteristics of other inputs. This form of analysis encourages us to see ICTs as multidimensional inputs which can have direct and indirect impacts on people's capabilities and thus consider ICTs within the broader development space. For example, mobile phones operated as transformative tools by altering inputs such as available government doctors and informal caregivers through their ability to call and seek consultations from the doctor. This transformative capacity was influenced by individual and social factors such as the digital literacy of the individual and gendered use of phones for communicating with social networks respectively. As a generative example, defunct TVs fulfil valued capabilities of being identified with a desired social group (Haenssger & Ariana, 2018). In sum, ICT4D is conceptualised as the use of scope 1 digital ICTs, like mobile phones, to expand the real freedoms that

people enjoy and remove major sources of unfreedom through their characteristics as generative inputs and transformative conversion factors.

2.1.2. The digital gender divide and ICT4D

The implementation of ICT4D should consider relevant social inequalities because policies which do not consider these inequalities often reinforce them. The digital divides is one such example of this: a multidimensional phenomenon consisting three parts: 1) a global divide between Global North and Global South countries in internet access, 2) a social divide within countries between information-rich and information-poor groups, and 3) a democratic divide between those who use ICTs to participate in public life and those who do not (Norris, 2001). Importantly, this not a simple binary, as individuals may experience different levels of access and engagement across ICTs and therefore exist along a spectrum (Kleine & Poveda, 2017).

Building on this understanding, Roberts and Hernandez (2019) developed the 5 'A's framework to highlight social and political factors that can limit technology access. These factors are nested and are listed in order from the most central to the most external: 1) agency: who has the self-efficacy to make use of the technology?; 2) abilities: who has the digital literacies to use the technology?; 3) awareness: who is (un)aware of the technology?; 4) affordability: to whom is the technology (un)affordable?; and 5) availability: to whom is the technology (un)available? This framework demonstrates how meaningful access to ICTs extends beyond infrastructure alone.

Gender is one such axis of inequality around which a social digital divide has evolved, rooted in patriarchal structures. In this thesis, gender is understood as a

social construction produced through repeated speech acts that bring individuals into gendered identities, such as “man” or “woman,” and constitute them as gendered subjects (Butler, 1988; Lykke, 2010). Over time, these processes mean render gender seemingly naturalised (Butler, 1990), and often, inaccurately, as a binary. Accordingly, while recognising gender as socially constructed, this thesis follows most existing literature by focusing analytically on a gender binary, namely men and women.

When policies are designed as gender neutral, they are expected to affect men and women equally. However, as Conway et al. (1995) point out, such policies can harm women by removing policies that specifically advantage women and by shifting the focus from the needs of women unable or unwilling to assume the life plan of a cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied man. This broader critique of gender-neutral policies is particularly relevant to the context of digital development, where gender-blind approaches to ICT access and use can obscure persistent inequalities and reinforce exclusion.

The digital gender divide is a long-established global phenomenon which refers to the gap between genders regarding both their opportunities to access ICTs and their use of the internet for a variety of activities (OECD, 2001). Across the literature, its causes are commonly grouped into four interrelated themes—ability, affordability, appetite, and availability—which closely mirror the dimensions of the 5 ‘A’s framework. Ability is related to the disproportionate barriers women face in engaging meaningfully with ICTs for productive purposes due to inter-related factors like social norms that limit their time (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Babirye et al., 2022; Ford, 2021; Ponge, 2016), their relative lack of education (Alozie & Akpan-Obong, 2017; Herbert, 2017; Ponge, 2016), their lack of ICT-related skills (Ford, 2021; Herbert, 2017; Singh, 2017), and their exclusion from technology education and design, which affects the amount of

content relevant to women's interests (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Kuroda et al., 2019; Ponge, 2016; Singh, 2017). Affordability refers to the disproportionate institutional and financial barriers women face, such as a limited ability to take out loans due to social norms and policies or a lack of economic autonomy or personal income (Ponge, 2016), which limit their access to technology. Appetite describes the expressed desire to engage with ICTs. Women often express a lower appetite than men because they feel ICTs can impact their safety and security and enable harassment (Ponge, 2016; Tyers, 2020) and because they perceive a lower value, and have a lesser understanding of, the potential of the internet (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; EQUALS, 2019). Finally, availability captures the low levels of network coverage and quality as well as gendered public spaces. For example, in places where ICT are distant, such as rural areas, women prioritise their household responsibilities like fetching water over travelling for coverage (Ponge, 2016; Singh, 2017) or women and girls are discouraged from entering public ICT spaces like internet cafes which are dominated by boys and men (Herbert, 2017). By discouraging women from engaging with ICTs in the same way as men, the gender divide exemplifies and reinforces imbalanced gendered outcomes—and ultimately unmaximized development outcomes—for ICT4D. These structural and attitudinal barriers are often mirrored in the very design and implementation of ICT4D policy, where the dominance of male actors and gender-neutral frameworks continues to limit meaningful progress of gender equity.

Yet, as Kleine (2018) emphasises, the digital gender divide is intersectional and cannot be generalised. Class, caste, age, and marital status intersect with gender, shaping women's opportunities in distinct ways. For instance, an upper-caste, urban married woman in Bangalore, supported by servant labour, may face very different time pressure than a young lower-caste woman in rural India caring for siblings. Such

contrasts illustrate how caring responsibilities intersect with other axes of disadvantage, deepening in the divide. Despite this complexity, men across contexts typically have fewer caring responsibilities and greater autonomy over their time, leaving gender an indispensable axis for analysing the digital divide.

Policy processes, however, often remain blind to these dynamics. ICT decision-making in Africa is frequently dominated by men (Alozie & Akpan-Obong, 2017; Ogato, 2013), contributing to gender-neutral policies that overlook or disadvantage women (Conway et al., 1995). Ethiopia exemplifies this problem: despite policy rhetoric on equality, the digital gender divide has persisted, which the Digital Gender Gap Project (2025) shows has moved from 68% in 2019 to 71% in 2024. Where targeted interventions are implemented, they prove effective. Initiatives such as promoting girls' early access to ICTs, developing relevant content, and expanding education opportunities have been shown to narrow divides (Singh, 2017). The ITU's Digital Transformation Centres Initiative, for example, provided training with women-specific outreach and accommodations for mothers, leading to women representing 65% of participants in its first phase (ITU, 2021; Teltscher, 2024). Nonetheless, without tackling underlying patriarchal structures, targeted programmes risk superficial change: boys and men continue to gain ICT experience while women lag further behind. As Alozie and Akpan-Obong (2017) caution, "the rising tide may very well lift all boats, but most women are not in the boat to start with."

2.1.3. Gap in the literature: a lack of feminist analyses of digital policies

Given the importance of the digital gender divide, it is perhaps surprising that few studies have analysed ICT policies with an explicit consideration of gender, and

rarely through a feminist lens. A gendered analysis examines how gender is constructed in ICT policies and how the policies expect to impact genders differently while feminist analyses investigate how policies fit within and challenge (or reinforce) gendered hierarchies and systems of oppression and how they will consequently affect women. Makoza (2022) reviewed the literature covering critical studies of national ICT policies as well as studies related to national ICT policies, such as government rhetoric and non-governmental organisational approaches, in the African context and found that only two, Muhibbu-Din (2011) and Makoza and Chigona (2013), explicitly considered gender, and only Muhibbu-Din (2011) used a feminist lens. Additional studies which didn't take a critical approach, such as Gapsiso and Jibrin (2016), Olatokun (2008) and Vyas-Doorgapersad and Auriacombe (2019), explicitly considered gender in their policy analyses but did not do so using a feminist lens. As a result of gendered analyses of ICT in Africa being more common than feminist analyses, there has been limited recognition of the broad structural barriers women face to engaging with ICTs with analyses either a) failing to acknowledge many of the structural barriers women face (Olatokun, 2008), or b) acknowledging the wide-ranging barriers women face but suggesting solutions reliant on increasing women's engagement in the public sphere without considering their roles in private life (Makoza & Chigona, 2013; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Auriacombe, 2019).

The lack of feminist analyses of ICT policies in Africa is a significant gap in the literature as feminist analyses present holistic suggestions for addressing the context-specific root causes of the digital gender divide as well as gendered systems of oppression. Addressing this gap will generate guidance for policymakers to implement ICT4D through policies which can lead to more equitable gendered outcomes in African countries. To fill this gap, I will seek to answer the following research question:

How does ICT4D policy fit within and interact with gendered power structures to address the digital gender divide?

2.2. Care and ICT4D

This section will detail the contested literature on definitions of care and then outline how care is defined in this thesis. This contestation arises initially from differences in viewing care as practice, in which care is seen as a form of labour, and care as a value, in which care is seen as something with normative significance; in addition to these perspectives, some view care as both practice and value.

I will subsequently describe the relationship between care and capabilities in which, through a relational view of capabilities, care is considered central in achieving functionings because care from individuals and the State provides people the resources to convert capabilities to achieved functionings. I will also detail the nuanced relationship between care and ICTs in which ICTs can improve care through improved communication and access to information but also harm care by increasing distress or conflict. Finally, I will discuss the relevant gap in the literature in which the relationships between care and ICTs, and ICTs and development, have been established but the impact of ICTs on development through care has not been explored.

2.2.1. Defining care

Reflecting its diversity and complexity, the definition of care is passionately contested across the literature. This is because, firstly, there is foundational disagreement regarding whether care should be considered primarily a practice, a value, or both.

Care as practice refers to the work involved in providing care and the standards by which care should be evaluated (Held, 2006). Good caring relations include care which is not only effective in meeting needs and is thus akin to capabilities and achieved functionings, but also through the motives with which caregiving is enacted. It is through the responsiveness of the care receiver, when they can respond, which this relation is sustained. Engster (2007) and Bubeck (2011) are scholars who hold this perspective yet provide different definitions of care by emphasising different aspects; this disagreement reflects the significance of care being contextual and informed by local norms and values. Engster (2007), for example, focuses on people's basic vital biological needs being met, on the development or sustaining of their 'basic capabilities,'⁵ and on the avoidance of unnecessary harm. He defines care as "everything we do directly to help individuals to meet their vital biological needs, develop or maintain their basic capabilities, and avoid or alleviate unnecessary or unwanted pain and suffering, so that they can survive, develop, and function in society." Bubeck (2011), alternatively, emphasises the 'face-to-face' aspect of caring while also excluding self-care in her definition of care, noting that care must meet the needs of another who cannot meet their needs themselves, such as a person living with a disability who cannot feed themselves and requires care to achieve the valued functionings of being well nourished. To Bubeck, care is "a combination of feelings of affection and responsibility, with actions that provide for an individual's personal needs or well-being in a face-to-face interaction." Each of these definitions reflect care as practice, as a form of labour, and yet others understand care as value and as something with normative significance.

⁵ Note, the definition of 'basic capabilities' refers to the list of central functional capabilities proposed by Nussbaum (1999) in her conceptualisation of the Capabilities Approach

Those who define care a value, such as Sevenhuijsen (1998) and Slote (2007), see it as something with normative significance. They recognise care as a moral good and the actions and intentions within care as being characteristic of morally admirable people and societies (Held, 2006). Sevenhuijsen (1998) relies significantly on the motive and understanding of care, such as attentiveness, responsiveness, and committing to engaging a variety of perspectives, to define care and bring it into a broader public sphere. While she discusses important aspects of practice such as thoughtfulness in defining care further, there is a lack of consideration of the effectiveness and competency in caring practices required for care to be delivered. Slote (2007), additionally, sees care as the 'motivational attitude of empathy' such that it can capture the wellbeing of all humanity. While this perspective is useful in highlighting the affective and emotional dimensions of care, it overlooks that care is also labour and that its practice and competent execution is a fundamental part of care and caring relations. It is for this reason that other authors, like Held (2006) and Himmelweit (1999), view care as both a practice and a value.

Recognising the importance of not only the practice of care, but its normative value as well, has guided the conceptualisations of other authors to see care as practice and virtue. Himmelweit (1999), for example, outlines that care consists of two different things: caring for, where the activity caters directly to the recipient's physical and emotional needs, and caring about, where the motivation for the activity is driven by a desire for the recipient's wellbeing. The care-recipient's belief that they are being cared for by someone who cares about them is central to whether good care is delivered, reflecting communing as a valued functioning (Chipango, 2023; Hoffmann & Metz, 2017). Held (2006) echoes a similar sentiment by describing how diverse

practices of care can be while also recognising that all forms require attentiveness, sensitivity and a responsiveness to needs.

An additional conceptualisation of care which sees care as practice and value—which will be used for this thesis—is that proposed by Tronto (1993). She defines care as the ways in which we “maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our environments, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex life-sustaining web.” This care occurs within the broader cultural institutional environment, including political, legal, and social institutions, which at once moulds society and is reinforced by society. This also includes self-care which, despite referencing only the self, is still relational. Drawing from the political history of self-help as collective struggle and the neoliberal adoption of the concept to develop self-care as an individualistic concept, Ward and Barnes (2015) argue self-care is achieved through our connections with others; it can be fully expressed only when one recognises one’s own needs for care and that these will be met in relation to others. This process of care is further defined to include four phases at the individual level, each of which has an associated moral value which are themselves intertwined, as described in Table 2 (Tronto, 1995). This definition was chosen because of its openness to cultural variation and because it extends care beyond the private sphere. It has been criticised, however, for being too broad as it includes almost all human activities as care (Held, 2006). In response, Tronto (2013a) argues that this conceptualisation is open to other forms of care not on this most general level by viewing care as an activity and a ‘kind of practice.’ There is, therefore, other ways to understand care as more specific practices nested within the broader care. One such way is the distinction between non-nurturant and nurturant caring as defined by Duffy (2011). Non-nurturant care involves caring for the physical world

which provides a base for nurturant caring, while nurturant care is care for another human which is directed at the relationship with that person. For example, cleaning the household is a form of non-nurturant care which can provide the basis through which effective childcare can be provided at home. Furthermore, care entails a ‘bundle of practices’ to account for different meanings of care across cultures as well as people’s intersectional identities (Raghuram, 2016).

Another relevant aspect of care regards the power relations between the caregiver and care-receiver. Waerness (1984a, 1984b) describes how different forms of care are delivered according to the relations of power between the person receiving the care work and the person providing the care work rather than the act of care itself or the intimacy of the relationship. While I will not delve into how these forms of care can differ because they still all fall under the definition of care used in this thesis, it is worth noting the minutiae of care within the definition. For example, there is a difference in the nature of care provided when a woman cleans the for an expectant husband compared with for her young children.

Table 2. Phases of care defined by Tronto (1993)

Phase number	Phase	Moral value
1	Caring about – recognising the existence of a need and assessing that the need should be met; this is culturally and individually shaped.	Attentiveness – without attention we cannot begin to address other’s needs. Being inattentive, or ignoring others, is a moral failure.
2	Taking care of – Assuming some responsibility for the recognised need and deciding how to respond to it.	Responsibility – embedded in a set of implicit cultural practices, rather than a set of formal rules or promises, this is a flexible concept based on intersectional identity. This differs from obligations which are more formalised.

3	Care-giving – the direct meeting of care needs. It involves physical work and often requires caregivers come in contact with the objects of care. This is distinct from ‘taking care of’ which, for example, could be the provision of money which requires further labour to convert the money as a resource to meet the actual need.	Competence – without the competent delivery of care, the need for care is not met even if the person intending to give care took responsibility for it.
4	Care-receiving – the recognition that the receiver of care will respond to the care. This is the only means of knowing that caring needs have actually been met because either the perception of the need in phase 1 may have been incorrect, or how the caregiver chose to meet the need could be insufficient or cause new problems.	Responsiveness – requires that we must remain alert to the possibilities for abuse that arise with vulnerability; adequate responsiveness requires attentiveness.

2.2.2. The role of ICTs in engaging with care

Literature exploring the link between care and ICTs is concentrated in media studies and describes a nuanced relationship without significant debate. Research has highlighted the impact of ICTs on caring through, non-exhaustively: caring while the caregiver and care recipient are not physically together (Ahlin, 2017; Berg et al., 2017; Brown, 2016; Christensen, 2009), online social support groups (Bender et al., 2021; Tanis, 2009), caregiving practices in informal and formal healthcare situations (Lauriks et al., 2007; Rouleau et al., 2017; Solli et al., 2018), the development of general knowledge to provide improved care (Lauriks et al., 2007), parenting (Racz et al., 2017; Smyth et al., 2023; Suárez et al., 2018; Suarez et al., 2016), and co-parenting (Ganong et al., 2012; Heard et al., 2023; Smyth et al., 2023). These findings generally present a relationship in which ICTs act as a generative input for expanding the capabilities of people to provide or receive care when they otherwise could not have, such as the ability to provide elderly care to parents after migrating from home (Ahlin, 2017) or the ability to develop relationships with other caregivers and send messages of solidarity across caring networks (Solli et al., 2018). They also position ICTs as transformative conversion factors for improving the quality of care provided by individuals or teams, including increasing access to information to increase the general

knowledge of caregivers to improve caregiving competence (Lauriks et al., 2007). ICTs also present risks to care, such as acting as a transformative conversion factor to increase conflict between post-divorced parents which can affect their care for their children (Smyth et al., 2023), and being a generative input in potentially alienating children from their parents if they feel their parents are being intrusive or invading their privacy through technology-enabled communication and tracking.

The work of Christensen (2009), Solli et al. (2018) and Tanis (2009) point to an important aspect of the relationship between ICTs and care: that, although the face-to-face aspect of care is sometimes lost, the ability to communicate the emotional aspects of care can still be present. Although the emotional aspects of care, such as empathy, compassion, and commitment, aren't required for care to be undertaken, Himmelweit (1999) implies that they are an important aspect of providing quality care, particularly in a paid caring scenario.

The relationship between ICTs and care is not static; it has evolved alongside technological developments. This is clearly illustrated by the evolution of mobile phones, used here as a collective term to refer to both early portable telephones without internet access—referred to in this thesis as 'brick phones'—and smartphones, which incorporate many computer-like functions, including internet browsing and the use of software applications ('apps'). The ways in which this technological evolution has shaped practices of care are outlined in Table 3. Importantly, these are not the only applicable examples of ICTs as a suite of ICTs are available to people at a given time. For example, although brick phones did not have video calling capabilities, people could use webcams and the internet to video call loved ones who were far away. This example was chosen though, because mobile phones have seen incredible uptake and are the iconic technology of ICT4D since the mid-late 2000s (Heeks, 2009)

and because mobile phones can be utilised almost anywhere and anytime by their nature.

Table 3. Examples of how brick phones and smartphones impact care

Caring action	Brick Phone	Smartphone
Communication and staying connected	Voice calls and text messages to communicate and stay connected (Ahlin, 2017)	Voice calls, video calls and text messages, and social media to communicate and stay connected with each other (Abbasi, 2015)
Accessing relevant information for care	Request and share knowledge with each other (Mashaka et al., 2019)	Request and share knowledge with each other, and access internet to access knowledge independently (Lauriks et al., 2007; Suárez et al., 2018)
Sharing caring responsibilities	Text messages and calls to communicate responsibilities (Ganong et al., 2012)	Apps purposefully designed for sharing responsibilities (Smyth et al., 2023)
Access to government services	Text messages to communicate the availability of in-person services (Smith et al., 2011)	Services can be accessed through apps and the internet
Support groups		Access to online support groups via the internet or social media (Tanis, 2009)

In the literature and to my knowledge, there have been few attempts to conceptualise ICTs relationship with care. Rather, the relationship between people and ICTs has been conceptualised and care is seen as a byproduct of this relationship. This is captured, for example, through the material semiotics approach which captures how ICTs are shaped by social relations while also playing a mediating role in caring relationships (Law, 2008). Ahlin (2017) used this approach to describe how the objects of care within Indian transnational families include not only humans, but non-humans as well. Christensen's concept of 'connected presence' (2009), which was first described in the context of spatially separated families in Denmark, is another attempt to conceptualise this relationship. 'Connected presence' describes the ability of ICTs to allow caregivers and care receivers to maintain presence at a distance as well as to allow people to continuously reactivate and reaffirm their bonds. While this

conceptualisation is primarily directed at the maintenance of intimate relationships, it could be extended to caring relationships in general as maintaining presence at a distance can be an important form of care and allows for members of a caring relationship to be more attentive to each other's needs as well as expressive of their own needs.

2.2.3. The relationship between care and development capabilities

There has been significant debate regarding the Capabilities Approach regarding the extent to which it is individualistic. In attempting to bring clarity to this debate, Ibrahim (2020) deconstructs the critiques of a focus on individualism into three forms of individualism: methodological individualism, which explains phenomena through the actions and choices of individuals; ontological individualism, which sees people as existing primarily as individuals where relations are instrumental; and ethical individualism in which the primary concern of morality is the individual and concerns individual flourishing rather than one's interactions with others. Robeyns (2008) argues that the Capabilities Approach embraces ethical individualism and does not rely on methodological nor ontological individualism, noting that ethical individualism is not incompatible with an ontology that recognises the connections between people. In doing so, she discusses how the Capabilities Approach accounts for social relations and social embeddedness but that it is ultimately the responsibility of the individual to make choices; these ideas are captured through detailed discussions of the role of others in the Capabilities Approach such as external capabilities (Foster & Handy, 2008) and relationality (Owens et al., 2022). Robeyns (2008) further argues that ethical individualism is important from a feminist perspective because people in positions of power are often the ones who define wellbeing for the household or community and

that women, given they are often low on the social hierarchy, do not have their interests represented. Consequently, while it is broadly recognised that capabilities are relational (Hoffmann & Metz, 2017; Owens et al., 2022; Smith & Seward, 2009), within this perspective individuals are atomistic and come together for instrumental reasons only.

Feminist development scholars have nevertheless challenged the adequacy of ethical individualism by highlighting the relational and power-laden conditions under which agency is exercised. Kabeer (1999, 2005) has been particularly influential here by conceptualising agency not as an isolated capacity for choice, but as a relational and negotiated process shaped by social norms, power relations, and material constraints. In her analysis, individuals may appear to exercise choice while acting within highly restrictive contexts characterised by dependence and unequal bargaining power, such as households, labour markets, or communities. Kabeer further shows how preferences themselves may be shaped by long-standing relations of power and dependence, such that individuals come to accommodate or normalise constraint; this is often described as adaptive preferences. Importantly, Kabeer cautions against interpreting such constrained choices as an absence of agency; rather, they reflect strategic forms of agency that operate within, and sometimes gradually reshape, existing power structures. This perspective complicates ethical individualist readings of the Capabilities Approach by demonstrating that the freedom to choose cannot be meaningfully understood without acknowledging the social relations and dependencies through which agency is enacted, thus foregrounding the relational dimensions of empowerment without abandoning the language of capabilities altogether.

The core of the debate regarding whether the Capabilities Approach is too individualistic arises because this view conflicts with the position that people coming together is an intrinsic aspect of life. While numerous authors investigate and argue in favour that capabilities are inherently relational, including Evans (2002) through his famous paper on 'collective capabilities,' it is the work of Chipango (2023) and Hoffmann and Metz (2017), who consider the Capabilities Approach through Ubuntu, a communitarian ethical theory developed in Africa, which I think best explain the *intrinsically* relational nature of capabilities and why an ethical individualist framework isn't necessarily appropriate.

Chipango (2023) and Hoffmann and Metz (2017) argue, first, that the Capabilities Approach prioritises the individual while insufficiently accounting for the relational value of people. In doing so, the approach struggles to capture how the means through which a functioning is achieved, such as actively dispossessing others, can indicate a weakened capability. For example, if one person accesses water or food at the expense of another's access, then this capability is not realised in its fullest sense because it undermines the capability of another. Importantly, Sen advances a closely related concern in his discussion of unfreedoms, arguing that development consists both in the removal of unfreedoms that limit people's opportunities to exercise reasoned agency and in the promotion of freedoms (Sen, 2001). However, despite these parallels with relational critiques, Sen's argument remains grounded in an individualistic framework: whereas Chipango (2023) and Hoffmann and Metz (2017) frame this issue in terms of relationships, Sen (2001) approaches it primarily through considerations of individual agency.

Relatedly, they discuss how the Capabilities Approach fails to fully appreciate the role of power relations and relations of dependence in recognising functionings.

This minimises the role of the State, political interests, and infrastructure and institutional resources in developing the context within which capabilities can be attained and how this can lead to imbalanced development. The skewed distribution of resources allocated by the state can also result in a weakened capability because one can fulfil functionings by passively benefiting from the way in which the state has dispossessed others. For example, Hoffmann and Metz (2017) describe how many white-owned agricultural businesses in South Africa have access to a rich water supply due to how infrastructural sources and water were diverted from former African 'homelands' during Apartheid; despite this access to water, their functioning is marred because they benefit from the dispossession of others. Furthermore, a relational approach to capabilities views this example as a disrupted relationship between the State and the citizens who have been dispossessed rather than solely as a consequence for the individuals themselves.

Chipango (2023) also outlines that the Capabilities Approach posits equality in terms of freedom but not solidarity. The freedom to choose does not cater for the need to belong and individual freedom does not necessarily lead to social solidarity. In a relational sense though, people should value each other because of their capacity to commune, seeing communing as a valued functioning. This idea of the importance of social solidarity and our capacity to commune, leads to their final point: that a lack of capability can be an obstacle to relations. Hoffmann and Metz (2017) outline that the deprivation of capabilities can limit a person's ability to care for others. They discuss how one's inability to recognise capabilities for oneself harms their ability to enter relationships in which they can care for others. For example, if one is uneducated, not only does it diminish their range of employment choices, but it may also limit how they

can provide for their loved ones or prevent them from helping their children learn at school.

As Dean (2009, p. 267) states when critiquing the individualistic nature of the capabilities approach: “human beings cannot be free from their dependency upon other human beings.” This recognition of the interdependent nature of human life hints at the strong underlying theme of care which exists across the supporting arguments for an inherently relational Capabilities Approach: care for each other and care between the State and citizens. Care is not only crucial to people being able to recognise capabilities, but to recognise capabilities fully in a way that doesn’t impede on others. Therefore, in analysing this debate, I believe that not only is the Capabilities Approach ethically and ontologically relational, but that care is at the heart of the Capabilities Approach to development.

2.2.4. Feminist Critiques of ICT4D

Feminist analyses of ICT4D practice have not explicitly analysed the intersection of care—including the feminist ethics of care (FEC), which will be expanded upon in section 2.3.4—and ICT4D, although much of this work resonates with care-ethical concerns. The work of Buskens and Webb (2009) (and authors therein), for example, foregrounded women’s lived experiences, the moral significance of relationships and social context, and the responsibilities of researchers and practitioners within ICT4D interventions. Other feminist scholars, like Hafkin (2006) and Gurusurthy and Chami (2014), have critiqued dominant ICT4D frameworks for their reliance on narrow indicators of access and use, as well as for obscuring the structural constraints that shape women’s engagement with ICTs, including education, gendered labour, and institutional inequalities.

More recent feminist ICT4D research extends these critiques through empirically grounded analyses of everyday technology use and social relations. Zelezny-Green (2017) examined how intersectional power relations, including gender, educational institutions, and social expectations shaped girls' engagement with ICTs in specific contexts, complicating the narrative of successful ICT programmes with respect to women's empowerment. Additionally, reflecting upon an ICT project in South Africa, Hussen (2018) and Hussen et al. (2016) described how women can participate in a project yet have no understanding or recognition that they are part of that project. In doing so, they further problematised notions of successful ICT projects as well as shed further light on the contextual and gendered barriers, including care responsibilities, women can face.

2.2.5. Gap in the literature: how ICTs impact development through care

As I have shown, care plays an important role in the attainment of capabilities because the ability to fully realise capabilities is restricted without it, such as attaining a capability through the dispossession of others by the State. Care also has an important relationship with ICTs given ICTs influence how we can care for others, including through the ability to be connected to people while physically apart and through increased access to knowledge. This pair of relationships, ICTs impacting care and care impacting capabilities, suggests that ICTs may have a developmental impact through their relationship with care. This is hinted at in the development of the technology-augmented capabilities approach by Haenssger and Ariana (2018) when they give an example of mobile phones being transformative tools by giving informal caregivers the ability to call and seek consultation from doctors.

This relationship has not been explored in the literature however as the relationships between care, ICTs and development have only been researched dyadically. In this thesis I will address this gap by answering the following research question:

How do ICTs impact development through their relationship with care?

Such an understanding is important as this can contribute to discussions regarding the digital development process, especially understandings of how ICTs impact development from a relational perspective and how the digital gender divide and care, both of which are gendered phenomena, impact ICT4D.

2.3. Evaluation in the Global South

In this section, I review several literatures from the field of evaluation. I first set the scene by exploring evaluation as a contested practice not only in definition, but in purpose as well. Upon selecting a definition, I move to outline the shortcomings of common evaluation practice which are most pertinent in the Global South and introduce the transformative evaluative paradigm as a broad potential means of addressing these. From here, I discuss the oft-neglected ethical dimensions of evaluation and, within this, an important debate regarding whether the evaluator should play an advocative role and, if so, how should they determine what is 'good.' I subsequently review the literature regarding the feminist ethic of care to present it as an ethical framing which could be used to address the shortcomings of evaluation in the Global South. Finally, I discuss the gap in the field which I will contribute to, namely using the feminist ethic of care to develop an evaluative approach suitable for addressing the challenges of evaluation in the Global South.

2.3.1. The definition and purposes of evaluation

Programme evaluation allows implementers to understand the effectiveness of their programmes as well as to potentially identify unintended impacts (Chen, 2015; Patton et al.), as such it should play an integral role in programme implementation. This contributes to decision-making processes relating to normative judgements like how to balance competing stakeholder interests in addition to which programmes to fund (or not fund) in future.

There is no agreed upon definition of evaluation within the field. Thomas and Campbell (2020) describe how the definition has evolved over time, with a strong emphasis historically placed on evaluation as a means of determining value through a positivist lens shifting to increasingly recognise the importance of social science methods such as qualitative methods and acknowledging the social, political, and cultural contexts programmes operate within. Green and South (2006) argue that despite a lack of an agreed upon definition there are two features common to most definitions: 1) assessing the effects of an intervention, and 2) whether goals have been achieved. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the definition of evaluation provided by the OECD-DAC (2024) because it is broadly accepted in the development field, though it is still contested. Evaluation is thus defined as: “The systematic and objective assessment of a planned, ongoing or completed intervention, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Evaluation also refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of an intervention. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into decision-making processes.”

There is also no broadly agreed upon purpose of evaluation either, although this is primarily because evaluations can suit many purposes rather than due to academic debate. The purpose of evaluations can include, firstly, to investigate the results of an intervention through impact evaluation. For example, Hoque (2020) conducted an impact evaluation of the 'Union Digital Centres' project in Bangladesh, which was designed to provide people easy access to information and ICT services through local governments, to understand how the programme impacted people's capabilities. Evaluations can also be used to examine the quality and nature of the implementation of an intervention; this is termed process evaluation. For instance, Teriö et al. (2019) undertook a process evaluation of the 'F@ce' programme in which mobile phones were used to support the family-centred rehabilitation of people who have had a stroke. Lastly, evaluations can also analyse and prioritise needs to inform planning for an intervention through a 'needs analysis.' Febro et al. (2020) demonstrated this in their first stage of developing a e-learning module for ICT skills for marginalised women and girls in the Philippines. Through a survey, they identified a digital gender divide in poor local communities and that some women and girls were ICT illiterate. According to Better Evaluation (2022), an evaluation knowledge platform developed by the Global Evaluation Initiative, who itself is a global network of organisations and experts supporting Global South governments with evaluation practices, there are four broad purposes of evaluation which most evaluations fit within; these are shown in Table 4 where formative and summative evaluation refers to evaluations conducted to make improvements in the programme and evaluations to decide whether to start, continue, expand, or stop a programme, respectively.

Table 4. Broad purposes of evaluation according to Better Evaluation (2022)

	Formative evaluation	Summative evaluation
Process evaluation	Focused on processes and intended to inform decisions about improving (primarily implementation)	Focused on processes: intended to inform decisions about continuing the intervention
Impact evaluation	Focused on impact: intended to inform decisions about improving (primarily design characteristics)	Focused on impact: intended to inform decisions about continuing the intervention

2.3.2. Shortcomings of evaluation in the Global South

Michael Bamberger, Marco Segone, and Florencia Tateossian, a set of leading development evaluation practitioners and authors, state the following about the relevance of conventional approaches to evaluation in the current development paradigm:

“As development initiatives become more complex, conventional evaluation approaches are no longer able to fully evaluate how multiple interventions funded, designed and implemented by multiple stakeholders, and operating in complex environments, contributed to observed changes in multiple (intended and unintended) outcomes. Under these increasingly common scenarios, it becomes necessary to find new evaluation approaches that are “complexity-responsive” and equity-focused and gender responsive.” (Bamberger et al., 2017, p. 75)

Dighe and Sarode (2019) detail several shortcomings of evaluation practice which are specific to the Global South and which are especially important because, compared with the Global North from where most evaluations are commissioned, contexts are less predictable, institutions and systems are more fragile and unstable, and vulnerabilities are magnified (Ofir, 2013). These flaws can mean evaluations cannot adequately play their role in helping judge the effectiveness of programmes in a way that doesn't further entrench power structures and in a way that is accountable to all stakeholders.

The first shortcoming outlined by Dighe and Sarode (2019) regards a narrow focus of accountability to donors rather than communities and beneficiaries. Evaluation in the Global South is dominated by the wants of donors as they are the primary intended users and clients of evaluations (Faulkner et al., 2015; Sridharan & De Silva, 2010). This means that evaluations are often focused on short-term performance measurements and outcomes, and on the efficiency of these outcomes. This creates not only a higher risk of producing inaccurate data compared with evaluations run by implementing organisations which often aim to understand project implementation and its impact on beneficiaries (Dighe & Sarode, 2019), but it also de-emphasises the perspectives of those most marginalised (Faulkner et al., 2015).

A second critique of evaluation in the Global South is the lack of evaluative capacity, which refers to the ability of evaluators in the country to adequately conduct evaluations on a broad scale. Ofir (2013) and Dighe and Sarode (2019) describe the need for evaluative capacities in the Global South to be able to address specificities of their contexts such as culture, socio-economic conditions, and language, which requires a well-developed understanding of poverty and systemic inequalities given the power asymmetries and vulnerabilities often present. The concept of being able to address cultural specificities is particularly significant because many countries in the Global South are multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual societies. Consequently, a strong knowledge of the context, including its people, places, history, and the culturally derived values of community stakeholders, is crucial, and knowledge of the local language—which is commonly associated with colloquial knowledge in evaluation practice in the Global South—is inadequate (Dighe & Sarode, 2019). Without an appropriate amount of evaluative capacity in the Global South, evaluations will be guided by Global North actors who often hold a normative bias which cause

evaluations to reproduce dominant societal norms and values, do little to prioritise beneficiaries of the programmes nor promote aspects of social justice and ecological sustainability, and often favour groups in power (Chen, 2015; Stame, 2018).

The bias toward experimental methods in impact evaluations is another shortcoming of evaluation in the Global South because they are often used to explain the impact of programmes, and thus donor contributions, in a linear manner (Dighe & Sarode, 2019). These methods satisfy the epistemological requirements common to the Global North such as impartiality, universality, and rationality, and are considered by some organisations, such as USAID (2020), to generate the strongest evidence because they follow the scientific method; in doing so, they treat programmes as laboratories and adapt methods of ‘hard science’ to evaluation. These principles, as well as their flaws, are exemplified well by randomised control trials (RCTs)⁶ which are considered by some, including the World Bank, USAID, and Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the ‘gold standard’ of impact evaluation (Webber & Prouse, 2018); it is important to note, though, that there is significant academic debate regarding the merits of RCTs (Duflo, 2012; Kabeer, 2020). RCTs are thought by their proponents to produce objective evidence, however normative judgements are made during research design, including which questions should be asked, who should be included in the sample, and how questions are asked. This can, for example, lead RCTs to develop evidence which fails to capture the outcomes of society’s most vulnerable due to stringent inclusion criteria and yet are considered useful to decision makers; this is seen in the RCT conducted by Maskew et al. (2020) for an intervention for HIV treatment initiation in areas of high

⁶ RCTs are an experimental form of impact evaluation which tests the extent to which specific, planning impacts are being achieved in a programme by comparing the outcomes of treatment and control groups which have been randomly chosen from the population.

tuberculosis prevalence. Participants were unable to participate if they were pregnant or considered 'physically, mentally or emotionally,' demonstrating that, while justified, exclusion criteria often intersect with those most vulnerable in society.

A final shortcoming of evaluation in the Global South is the general neglect of complexity and unintended outcomes. Complexity refers to many features of a system, including uncertainty, emergence, diversity, and interrelations between many components. Ofek (2016) explains that the growing complexity of programmes has become an increasingly important phenomenon for evaluation because of interorganisational arrangements and overarching policies, and because the public sector has faced a rising demand for public and external accountability, the implementation of result-based management systems, and a growing focus on programme improvement. As development programmes become more complex, it is important for approaches to evaluation to be able to fully evaluate multiple intended and unintended outcomes; current standard approaches are no longer able to do this (Bamberger et al., 2017). Ofek (2016) and CECAN (2017) suggests that complexity-aware evaluation approaches need to be used so that we can better understand how actors interact with and through systems, and how those translate to outcomes. The recognition of complexity is the first step in responding to calls for evaluative practice in the Global South to use more holistic, systems-informed, integrated approaches which support sustainable transformative development (Ofir, 2021).

It is crucial that these shortcomings are addressed if evaluation in the Global South is to fully evaluate the outcomes of development programmes. One means of doing this is through the selection of an appropriate evaluative approach. Approaches to evaluation refer to the sets of principles which guide how an evaluation is conducted and are often developed through theory to address perceived

shortcomings of current evaluative approaches (Donaldson, 2022). Mertens and Wilson (2018) describe four broad paradigms into which approaches to evaluation fit:

- Postpositivist: focus primarily on quantitative design and data; may use mixed methods in which quantitative methods dominate;
- Pragmatic: Focus primarily on data that are found to be useful for stakeholders; advocates for mixed methods;
- Constructivist: focuses primarily on identifying multiple values and perspectives through qualitative methods; may use mixed methods in which qualitative methods dominate; and
- Transformative: focuses primarily on perspectives of marginalised groups and interrogating systemic power structures through mixed methods to further social justice and human rights.

The most common approaches promoted by large evaluating organisations, like UNEG (2016), FCDO (2023), and USAID (2020), fit in the postpositivist paradigm, which do little to address the shortcomings mentioned. Transformative approaches, like culturally responsive evaluation, deliberative democratic evaluation, and indigenous approaches (Chilisa, 2015; Mertens & Wilson, 2018) are particularly adept, however, at challenging these shortcomings through their focus on systemic power structures, marginalised groups, and mixed methods.

2.3.3. The ethical dimensions of evaluation

The reluctance to engage with the ethical aspects of evaluation across academia is shown through a review by Coryn et al. (2017) who found that only 3.5% of 257 articles published from 2005-2014 in evaluation-focused journals addressed values or valuing in evaluation. Despite this lack of engagement, the ethical

dimensions, or axiology, of evaluations have a significant impact on the direction an evaluation may take because they inform what is valued. For example, postpositivist and transformative evaluation approaches holds similar axiological assumptions of beneficence, respect, and justice but interpret them differently. Where postpositivists view these through an equality lens and seek to try everyone equally, transformative proponents consider this through a more critical lens and consider issues of power and addressing inequalities as a means of fulfilling these axiological assumptions (Mertens & Wilson, 2018). This then impacts the methods used for evaluations as postpositivists see RCTs as an effective means of evaluation whereas transformative evaluators prefer mixed methods to establish relationships through dialogue and a deep contextual understanding.

A critical example of how these axiological differences impact evaluation is seen through the vigorous academic debate regarding the degree of advocacy that the evaluator should undertake throughout the evaluation process (Brisolara, 2018; Datta, 1999). This advocacy can take many forms, ranging from strategic dissemination of findings to engaging in activities which seek to shift power structures (Brisolara, 2018). On one hand, some believe evaluator advocacy should be minimised. They argue that ethics and morality are not an appropriate space for evaluation to be attentive to because 1) valuing impartiality means the evaluator must be neutral in relation to other stakeholders, and 2) being objective means separating facts from values (Stame, 2018). Supporters of this view see advocacy as incompatible with the role of evaluator and argue that any advocacy should be conducted after the evaluation is completed. This stance is taken by many evaluating bodies including USAID (2020), UNEG (2016), and OECD-DAC (2010) because bias is associated with uncredible data, and is well summarised by past leading evaluators Peter Rossi, cited by Alkin (2013, p.

111), and Robert Stake (Shadish et al., 1991, p. 49). They respectively say, “Evaluation is not, and should not be used as, an instrument for social change: that is the central task of political processes” and “The evaluator should not impose one ethical view on a program in a political system characterized by value pluralism.”

On the other hand, others argue that advocacy is inherent to the evaluation process because it is a practice aimed at doing good through its social duty as a profession (Ofir, 2018a; Scriven, 2016); the extent of advocacy should thus be decided according to relationships with stakeholders. They recognise the political nature of evaluation and that, resultantly, evaluators should advocate as strongly as needed to ensure that those affected by the evaluation are engaged in the process so that the evaluation can be consequential to them (Simons & Greene, 2018). Transformative approaches to evaluation, such as LGBTQ+ evaluation (Phillips et al., 2022), ‘Made in Africa’ approaches (Fish, 2022) and feminist evaluation, naturally exist toward this pro-advocative end of the spectrum, with feminist evaluation scholars arguing that “action and advocacy are morally and ethically appropriate responses of an engaged feminist evaluator because action is the purpose of knowledge” (Brisolara & Seigart, 2012).

Amongst those who argue for evaluator advocacy, there is further discussion regarding the normative aspects of evaluation, or, how to assess what is ‘good’ to advocate for. Ofir (2018b) expresses that evaluation work, when conducted uncritically, reproduces dominant societal values and norms which privilege rationality, individualism, and white and male values. Furthermore, there are concerns that guidelines focused on avoiding harm can restrict good behaviour (Simons, 2006). Heider (2017) discusses this within the development space of evaluation when proposing a review of the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, sustainability, and impact. She describes how these criteria, despite

appearing to be value-free, were informed by a set of values and questions whether these meet the intentions of the SDG agenda which promoted inclusivity and respecting underprivileged groups. When addressing how to determine what is ‘good’ in evaluation in the development space, Ofir (2018a), a leader in this area, discusses how we should move away from evaluating impact in isolation from all else and should evaluate with consideration of the social and institutional environment that can build on—or detract from—programme outcomes. Stame (2018) summarised three criteria to define what is good, each of which has varying flexibility based on stakeholder input:

- Criteria determined by the characteristics of development: coherence, impact, sustainability, development effectiveness, and responsiveness and improvisation. These are non-negotiable across all programmes and policies;
- Criteria determined by mandates, values and norms: equity, gender-equity, harmony with nature and in society, and inclusivity. These are somewhat flexible; and
- Criteria determined by specific stakeholder interests: cost-effectiveness, scalability, evaluability, compliance, efficiency, and effectiveness. These are fully flexible.

2.3.4. The feminist ethic of care

Abma et al. (2020) present ethics of care as a means of addressing the normative aspects of evaluation. This ethical framework encourages evaluators to place relationships, morality and care at the centre of evaluation, which opens dialogue and deliberation about what good care means.

Ethics of care is a field of feminist ethics which stems from research by Carol Gilligan (1982), which was built upon by Nel Noddings (1984), into women's morality and ethical decision-making in the private sphere, including parenting and caring for the vulnerable, and the division of household labour. It is an example of feminine ethics which sought to challenge the masculine assumptions which underlay Western ethical thought such as proposing a relational ontology in place of an individualistic ontology as well as a new set of epistemological assumptions, replacing an emphasis on impartiality, universality, abstraction, and rationality, with a focus on partiality, particularity, concreteness, and a balance between rationality and emotion, respectively (Keller & Kittay, 2017).

Tronto's definition of care develops the political dimensions of care ethics by considering both the private and public spheres of life. In doing so, it has provided impetus for scholars to investigate how the ethic of care could be expanded into other fields, including healthcare (Sherwin, 1992), economic structures (Folbre, 2012), animal welfare (Crary, 2016), international relations (Robinson, 2011), and culture (Held, 2006).

This definition also shifts care ethics from a feminine ethic which promotes women's unique voice and advocates for an ethic of care (Houser et al., 2006) to a feminist ethic which argues against male domination and advocates for equal rights (Houser et al., 2006). The feminist ethic of care (FEC) satisfies the criteria proposed by Jaggar (2001) which makes an ethical framework feminist by, firstly, considering the private sphere in addition to the public sphere of life. It also promotes the consideration of the moral experiences of all, premises itself on the fact that women and men are unequal in society and that these positions impact people differently according to their intersectional identities, and emphasises the potential for political

change through practical actions by acknowledging that people can both resist and consent to power structures through individual actions within broader context- and time-specific social practices.

There is contestation among care ethicists, however, regarding the definition of care used in care ethics. This firstly arises from debate regarding the primary focus of care ethics; some see value in emphasising the substantive focus of care and response orientation (Abma et al., 2020; Aga et al., 2008; Berhane, 2020) while others prioritise the methodological focus of the contextual-deliberative picture of moral thinking (Hankivsky, 2014; Raghuram, 2016; Tronto, 2013b). Tronto's definition of care used fits into the methodological stream.

There is further debate centring the complexities regarding power, debated notions of difference in capabilities and vulnerabilities in defining care (Narayan, 1995), and the potential of creating the 'other.' One on hand, care can be seen as positive and empowering while, on the other, it can be viewed as controlling and possessive (Fox, 1995). Scholars such as Davy (2019) and Cockburn (2005) in the disability and childhood and youth fields respectively, have recognised that care receivers have previously been silenced and seen solely as dependent but that the complexities of care can only be fully realised when their voices are considered.

Feminist ethics of care, as a field, is currently contending with two key critiques as part of these debates. The first of these regards its methodological foundations as a study of predominantly white, upper middle-class women; Gilligan's study was based in ableism, colonialism, cisheterosexism, and white supremacy (Gary, 2022). Scholars have noted Gilligan's work ignored "differences among women that might shape alternative moral perspectives about matters of care" (Graham, 2007) and critiqued

the essentialist tendencies that characterised the early conceptualisation of care which marginalised issues of race, class and sexuality (Hoagland, 1988; Houston, 1990; Puka, 1990). A growing body of literature is emerging which addresses this critique, however, by focusing on care ethics through an intersectional lens (Hankivsky, 2014; Raghuram, 2019). Through the unsettling of the concept of care by accounting for aspects of identity such as race and class, the concept has been further developed into an ethical framework grounded in the “concrete activities of real people in the context of webs of social relations” (Mahon & Robinson, 2011) and which builds a plurality of experiences into its structure (Gary, 2022).

The second critique relates to the irreducible otherness which was often not considered during the early development of the ethic of care (Gary, 2022). A number of theorists have sought to expand the epistemological scope as a means of addressing this; for example, Bourgault (2020) discusses the consideration of epistemic injustices and marginalisations in our communities relating to how we prescribe credibility, or epistemological recognition, to different groups of people. Furthermore, Dalmiya (2016) introduces the concept of ‘relational humility,’ a means of deconstructing epistemic individualism and recognising the value of knowledge in, and gaining knowledge from, others.

Despite the critiques and debate surrounding the feminist ethic of care, it is a strong normative framework to address the shortcomings of evaluation in the Global South. This is because: its feminist roots encourage evaluators to be accountable to beneficiaries rather (or prior to) donors; its emphasis on care throughout our lives can push evaluators to care for evaluation practice and ensure an appropriate evaluative capacity for the evaluation; its epistemological tenets endorse mixed methods and

participative approaches; and the centrality of relationships encourages an exploration of complexity and unintended programme outcomes.

2.3.5. Gap in the literature: a shortage of appropriate approaches to evaluation in the Global South

As outlined by Bamberger et al. (2017), there is currently a shortage of evaluative approaches which are appropriate for the increasingly complex nature of development programmes and evaluation as a field is in need of approaches which are complexity-responsive, equity-focused and gender responsive. Not only this, but additional shortcomings outlined by Dighe and Sarode (2019) need to be addressed if evaluation is to effectively play its role in programme implementation and decision making.

To fill this gap in the literature, I propose the theoretical development of an approach to evaluation drawing from the feminist ethic of care guided by the following research question:

How can the feminist ethic of care inform an approach to evaluation to position it to capture the gender- and care-related impacts of ICT4D?

3. Will policy help close the digital gender divide? A Feminist policy analysis of Ethiopia's National Digital Policy

Will policy help close the digital gender divide? A Feminist policy analysis of Ethiopia's National Digital Policy

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Note:

This chapter is presented as published.

3.1. Introduction

Digital technologies are widely expected to play a role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (Hoosain et al., 2020) as well as accelerating economic development around the world through 'digital development'. Defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2022) as "an ever evolving range of technologies (like mobile technologies, artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain, Internet of Things, and robotics to name a few) that impact all aspects of our world", they can not only help increase the gross domestic product (GDP) of a country, but can also play a role in changing the structure of an economy (Nafziger, 2012). Furthermore, they can lead to other improvements in life such as increased levels of education (Nafziger, 2012) and accelerating progress towards gender equality (Alozie & Akpan-Obong, 2017).

The latter is an important potential outcome of digital development because gender equality plays an important role in development. Not only is it an issue of justice, countering ideologies of women's inferiority used to subjugate women, but gender inequality is developmentally inefficient (Goetz, 2014). Its importance is underlined by the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," evidence of the international expectation that gender equality and women's wellbeing play an important role in nations' development.

The digital gender divide (DGD), defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2001) define as the gap between genders regarding both their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their use of the internet for a variety of activities, is a pertinent example of a gendered issue which can decelerate progress towards gender equality

during digital development however. Strong policy intervention is required to address not only the root causes of the DGD (Singh, 2017), but also to create a framework which can handle the challenges of the fast pace of digital development (Herbert, 2017) while also reducing inequalities (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2020).

Ethiopia is a leading example of a country pursuing significant digital development, one which can present lessons to other countries looking to undertake, or currently undertaking, a similar development pathway. They first ratified their ICT strategy in 2009 (Mammo, 2016) and have sought to maintain a focus on gender equality throughout this process; developing policies, structures and legislation, while committing to integrating gender into policy and strategic documents (Bekana, 2020), in an attempt to move away from the patriarchal norms that have historically governed the country.

In this paper, I contribute to the literature by adding to the research on gender and national ICT policies in the Global South (Gapsiso & Jibrin, 2016; Olatokun, 2008; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Auriacombe, 2019). I conduct a critical feminist policy analysis of a selection of Ethiopia's national policies related to digital technologies to draw lessons from their approach to digital development and its impact on the DGD. I achieve this by answering the following questions:

RQ1) How do Ethiopian government policies relating to engagement with digital technologies consider gender and gendered issues?

RQ2) How do Ethiopian government policies capture the causes of the digital gender divide?

The analysis begins by conceptualising and theorising the policy context to develop an understanding of the contexts within which the policies were formed and

operates. It subsequently presents a two-stage analysis of the policy content, firstly using a critical feminist policy analysis framework as a means of investigating how gendered aspects of power are impacted through the suite of policies, and secondly analysing how the policies capture the causes of the DGD. After completing the analysis, I finish by discussing the impacts of the policies on women's engagement with digital technologies as well as international applications of this analysis.

3.2. Ethiopia's pursuit of development and gender equality

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa, home to approximately 110 million people, of which approximately 85% live in rural areas. It is characterised by extensive religious and ethnic diversity, including most major world religions in addition to animist creeds, and consists of over 85 ethnic groups (Webb et al., 1994) which are constitutionally split into 9 ethno-linguistic national regional states and two administrative councils.

Across this geography there is also diversity in gender norms, although the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2020) outlines that these norms are typically strongly patriarchal. Women, for example, are disadvantaged when it comes to making major decisions in the household compared with men, such as making large household purchases, and bear a significant proportion of the care labour in the household (UNICEF, 2020). The Derg regime, which overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie and governed Ethiopia from 1974-1991 with a communist ideology, not only led the country to economic collapse, widespread famine, and a reliance on foreign aid (Crummey et al., 2022), but also promoted strongly patriarchal gender roles. A transition of power to the Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) between 1991 and 1993 brought with it progressive ideas surrounding gender; ideas

which the current Abiy Ahmed government has built upon. Since 1993, these governments have attempted to counter patriarchal attitudes by empowering and improving the rights of women through the implementation of structures, policies, and legislation to promote gender equality. These have included, for example, 'granting' women "equal rights with men" in the Constitution and placing women in important political positions such as President (Breuning & Okundaye, 2021; Schemm, 2018). Tangible improvements in gender equality across the country have resulted, including narrowing the gender gaps for youth employment and education (UNICEF, 2020).

The Government is also pursuing a development pathway which has the potential to empower women and "unleash their potential" (GoE, 2015). The fall of the Derg regime catalysed Ethiopia's pursuit of strong economic growth as a means of removing itself from amongst the least developed countries in the world (Alem et al., 2014). The EPRDF introduced a democratic form of government and a market economy, while also opening the economy to the rest of the world (Clapham, 2019; Gebrehiwot, 2019; Woldesenbet, 2020). They also pursued economic growth by emphasising development of the industrial and agricultural sectors, rather than just the agricultural sector as the Derg had done (Haile, 2015). This shift in focus successfully promoted economic growth and the partial fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as a rise in female entrepreneurship (Korzenevica et al., 2022). It has also extended to the current Abiy Ahmed government through the promotion of the manufacturing industry, a sector often dominated by women (Abebe et al., 2020).

The Ethiopian Government has also placed tremendous emphasis on digital technologies and digital development as part of its current pathway for development since 2009 (Mammo, 2016). Basing their digital transformation strategy on China, Ethiopia's aspiration is to catch up with Kenya, a leading example of rapid digital

transformation in East Africa, by 2025 (Tesfachew, 2022). Their strategy firstly emphasises export-led industrialisation with a focus on the manufacturing sector and its links with agriculture; China's e-commerce model is expected to help Ethiopia implement this strategy. The second focus is on building technology parks to facilitate investment in IT-related activities in Ethiopia (Tesfachew, 2022). Given these strategies are well integrated into Ethiopia's national development policies, there is optimism that digital transformation will bring widespread benefits to the country.

This optimism should not be had without caution however, as not all impacts of technology are positive. Digital technologies can be used to violate human rights, enable gender-based violence, and can widen social inequalities (UN, 2020). In development settings, those who adopt digital technologies first, often those who are already wealthy and skilled, are well positioned to reap the benefits of ICTs compared with those who are poor in adopting such technologies. This risks the benefits of digital development being concentrated in the hands of the powerful while those in lower positions of power fall behind. It is imperative therefore, that the diverse impacts of digital technologies in development are considered within their context so that they can be integrated with society in a way that is fair and just, ensuring those who are at risk of being left (further) behind are given the opportunity to catch up.

3.2.1. The causes of the digital gender divide in the Global South

Bridging the DGD has become an important focus of development research because the gendered impacts of technologies must be recognised for digital development to help progress towards gender equality (Alozie & Akpan-Obong, 2017; UN, 2005). The causes of the DGD in the Global South can be captured through four broad categories: affordability, availability, ability, and appetite (Tyers, 2020).

Affordability refers to the disproportionate financial and institutional barriers women face which limit their access to technology. This can result from a lack of economic autonomy or personal income (Herbert, 2017; Tyers, 2020), as well as a limited ability to take out loans because social norms, policies, and laws typically favour men's ownership of assets and property (Ponge, 2016). Availability, meanwhile, captures the low levels of network coverage and quality contributing to the DGD (Singh, 2017). In places where ICT services are usually far away, such as rural areas, women rarely choose to walk long distances to access such services, usually prioritising their household responsibilities like fetching water (Ponge, 2016). Furthermore, public ICT spaces like internet cafes are gendered, with boys and men dominating these areas and women and girls discouraged from entering (Herbert, 2017). Women's ability to engage meaningfully with ICTs captures the factors which prevent women from being able to use digital technologies for productive purposes. This ability is limited by a number of inter-related factors including: social norms (such as domestic responsibilities) which limit their time (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Ford, 2021; Ponge, 2016); their relative lack of education (Alozie & Akpan-Obong, 2017; Herbert, 2017; Ponge, 2016); their lack of ICT-related skills (Ford, 2021; Herbert, 2017; Singh, 2017); and their exclusion from technology education and design which impacts the amount of content relevant to women's interests (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Kuroda et al., 2019; Ponge, 2016; Singh, 2017). Finally, appetite refers to women's desire to engage with ICTs. This relates to barriers including women's worries regarding how ICTs can impact women's safety and security and enable their harassment (Ponge, 2016; Tyers, 2020; UN, 2022), and a relatively lower perceived value of, and lesser understanding of the potential of, the internet (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; EQUALS, 2019).

A transformative social policy approach is seen as one way of addressing issues of gender which are pervasive throughout society. This policy paradigm emphasises building the capacity of women and men to challenge existing norms and structures which oppress women, recognising that social, economic and political structures interact to prevent marginalised people, like women, from benefiting from 'standard' development policies (Tekwa & Adesina, 2018). It seeks to achieve this through policy objectives such as equal access to education, equal access to paid work, and genuine political representation (Bekana, 2020; Kabeer, 2005).

3.3. Methodology

I conducted a critical policy analysis to explore the discourse of gender equality and policies regarding gender. This firstly involved conceptualising and theorising the policy context under study; positing the historical conditions which shaped, and the experiences which moulded, the policies. By recognising the historical, political, economic, and cultural environments the policies are a product of and are bounded by (Pawson, 2006), the foundations from which a critical analysis can occur are formed (Rata, 2014).

The second step involved analysing the policies themselves, making explicit connections to the policy context when relevant. An intersectional feminist policy analysis framework was adapted from Kanenberg et al. (2019) and McPhail (2003) to guide the first-stage analysis, positioning gender as a fundamental category for analysis, and emphasising analysis around differences, local context, specificity, and historicity. To adapt this, the topics of the original framework were initially reviewed to identify which were relevant to the research questions; the selected topics as well as their relevance to the analysis are shown in Table 5. Once the topics of analysis were determined, the suggested questions for each topic were selected based on their relevance to the research questions.

Table 5. The topics framing the intersectional feminist policy analysis as adapted from Kanenberg et al. (2019). The relevance to analysis column includes a brief description of each topic.

Topic	Relevance to analysis
Gender neutrality	Gender neutral policies assume to affect men and women equally. Such policies can harm women by shifting focus from the needs of women unable, or unwilling, to assume the life plan of the cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied male, and by removing policies that specifically advantage women (Conway et al., 1995).
Context	Context refers to policy consideration of the world within which women live, including the political, economic, and social realities of women.
Equality	Equality refers to treating people differently as a means of overcoming institutional discrimination to treat them equally well (Kendrigan, 1991).
Intersectional identities	Intersectionality explains how the interconnection of social identity categories such as race, ability, sexuality, and gender work simultaneously to create experiences of marginalisation and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). If

	those not represented by a particular social category are not given a voice, policymakers risk oversimplifying policies by assuming that each feature of identity perfectly captures some shared experiences (Kanenberg et al., 2019; Kim & McCann, 2020).
Sociocultural underpinnings of the problem	This focuses on whether the policy acknowledges the sociocultural aspects which may underlie the issue it aims to address.
Women as private actors	Household labour, work mostly undertaken by women, has historically been undervalued and insufficiently acknowledged (McPhail, 2003). This unequal burden of work results in women being disadvantaged in public life (Folbre, 2001).
State-market constriction	State-market constriction refers to how the state and/or economic markets combine to constrict the lives of women. This may include a lack of recognition of care labour and how it can restrict carers' abilities to engage with intended policy outcomes, and policies which increase women's dependence upon men or the state.
Power analysis	Gender is understood as a system of power which is partly a consequence of policy outcomes. This analysis conceptualises power as relational and constitutive of social actors and the social world they inhabit (Allen, 2022). It emerges through the interplay of human agency and constitutive power, such that "power is only evident in relational, performative moments" (Nightingale & Ahlborg, 2018).
Material/symbolic reform	A material policy is one in which the implementation and policy outputs are expected to actually improve the problem they were designed to solve, while a symbolic policy is one which is ineffective in addressing the problem it was designed to improve (McPhail, 2003). Key differences between material and symbolic policies often centre on the resources provisioned to implement the policy.

A second-stage policy content analysis was conducted based on the four causes of the DGD according to Tyers (2020): affordability, availability, ability, and appetite. This stage of analysis explicitly looked through a gendered lens for how the policies captured each cause of the DGD. The guiding questions for the analysis are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Guiding questions for the second-stage policy content analysis

Cause of DGD	Guiding question
Affordability	Does the policy address gendered issues relating to the affordability of digital technologies?
Availability	Does the policy address gendered issues relating to the availability of digital technologies?
Ability	Does the policy address gendered issues relating to women's ability to meaningfully use digital technologies?
Appetite	Does the policy address gendered issues relating to people appetite for engaging with digital technologies?

Following the analysis, each policy was given a score from zero to three to indicate how well each topic of the first- and second-stage analyses were considered; this is shown in Table 7.

Table 7. What each score represents for the analysis

Score	Meanings
0	No acknowledgement of the topic in the policy
1	Little acknowledgement of the topic in the policy, such as mentioning the topic with no elaboration on its impacts on women or society
2	Some acknowledgement of the topic in the policy, like mentioning the topic and detailing how to approach relevant issues
3	Strong acknowledgement of the topic in the policy, not only recognising the topic and how to approach relevant issues, but also outlining the root causes of the issue and their impact

The policies analysed were the Ten Years Development Plan (10YP), Digital Ethiopia 2025, Ethiopian Education Roadmap 2018-2030 (EEDR), and Education Sector Development Programme VI (ESDP VI). These policies were selected because they are the key national-level policies which have the potential to significantly impact women's engagement with technology throughout the short- to long-term. Examples of policies excluded from the analysis are the Health Sector Transformation Plan II which lacked relevance, the National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2006-2010 which was outdated, and the Ease of Doing Business Medium-Term Reform Map from the Prime Minister's Office which was deemed unlikely to significantly impact women's engagement with digital technologies due to its focus on administrative reforms.

It is important to note that the scarcity of publicly available online English-language policies limited the analysis. Regional-level policies are important, particularly due to federal structure of the country; however, they are not easily accessible or translated to English, and hence they were omitted from the study. The selected policies, however, strongly inform the social and economic development policies of the regional governments, particularly given the centralisation of power in Ethiopia since 1995 (OECD, 2016; Yimenu, 2021). Government websites had many

policies which had not been officially translated to English which could have benefitted the analysis. For example, the Ethiopian Technical and Vocational Education Policy, which sets the framework for education and training related to occupations not taught in university, could not be analysed.

Despite these limitations, the sample of policies analysed provide a good overview of how Ethiopia's broad digital strategy includes gender.

3.4. Policy Analysis

This chapter will outline the results of the policy analysis, firstly detailing the relevant policy context, and then stating the findings of the policy content analysis.

3.4.1. Step 1 – Policy Context

The policy context consists of two 'layers': the first being the broad historical, cultural, economic, and political contexts within which the policies were developed, and the second being the policies immediately preceding those being analysed. By conceptualising the policy context as such, a deeper understanding of the complex system within which these policies were developed and implemented can be gained.

Since the fall of the Derg regime, Ethiopian governments have pursued a development pathway acknowledging women's role; signalling an intention to move away from the strongly patriarchal country it has historically been (UNICEF, 2020). Progress towards gender equality has been framed firstly by the 1993 National Policy on Women which, the World Bank (WB) (1998) states, developed the appropriate structures within government offices and institutions to create gender-sensitive and equitable policies. For example, there is a 'Women, Children and Youth Affairs Directorate' in each government ministry. The Constitution reinforced many of the

objectives of this policy by promoting women's participation in political, economic, and social life, in addition to the right to full consultation in the formulation of national policies (FDRE, 1995). Progress was also framed by Ethiopia's membership in the African Union, international and regional treaties it is a signatory of, and the SDGs. As a member of the African Union and signatory to treaties such as the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples on the Rights of Women in Africa (Drucza et al., 2020), Ethiopia is expected to pursue gender equality. This position is strengthened by the SDGs, which provide an UN-backed blueprint for how countries can (or, arguably, are expected to) approach sustainable development, including a strong consideration of the gendered outcomes of development as well as empowering women and girls.

The combination of these framing factors led the Ethiopian government to take an integrationist approach, promoting the women's equal participation in the policy process to achieve gender parity without challenging the existing patriarchal hegemonic social structure (Bekana, 2020). Despite achieving tangible improvements in gender equality (UNICEF, 2020), there are concerns that this approach is unlikely to create long-term cultural change. This is because the integrationist approach of the government suggests that the policies formed within the patriarchal Ethiopian context are likely to be insufficient for transforming gender relations in the long-term.

The receipt of foreign aid with political conditionality has an additional strong influence over policies. Political conditionality requires that certain criteria need to be met for aid to continue to be supplied (Baylies, 1995); Barya (1993) describes this situation as aid recipients being "beholden to the 'donor' [who] must try and be good boys (and/or girls, if any)." Since the early 1990s, Western governments and aid agencies, including those who send aid to Ethiopia, have linked their monies with the

conditions of the protection of basic human rights, democracy and good governance (Crawford & Kacarska, 2019; Swedlund, 2017). Reports by Chadwick (2022) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2022) show that the flow of aid to the GoE can easily be stymied if they do not meet these conditions because the European Union decided to freeze funding to the GoE due to human rights violations in Tigray. Hence, the policies and actions of the GoE are somewhat beholden to the wants of donors if it wishes to continue receiving foreign aid.

The second layer of policy context consists of the policies preceding each of the policies to be analysed, shown in Table 8: the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) II, the Homegrown Economic Reform agenda (HGER), the 2016 ICT Policy, and the ESDP V. A brief review of each policy revealed a varied consideration of women, ranging from no consideration in the HGER to meaningful consideration of gender in the 2016 ICT Policy. The HGER failed to recognize the gendered economic impacts of the proposed economic reforms, such as promoting the highly feminized and significantly underpaid textile industry as a means of pursuing economic growth. The GTP II presented gender as a cross-cutting issue in development and outlined goals specific to support women; these goals seemed mostly symbolic however given their overall vagueness and the insufficient framework for how these goals were to be achieved. The ESDP V sought to improve girls' access to education and provide gendered key performance indicators for achieving this; it does little to mention the barriers girls face to education, however. Finally, the 2016 ICT Policy recognized not only the gendered nature of digital technologies, but also their potential to help empower women, having presented goals to specifically help women reap the benefits of improved digital infrastructure as well as frameworks on how to achieve them.

It is difficult to understand how highly prioritised gendered issues are however, even in the policies which actively consider gender. Bekana (2020) found that Ethiopian officials saw gender equality as a strong method for achieving existing development objectives rather than being among the first priorities of the government. Therefore, although the consideration of gender varies across the policies, this suggests that commitments towards gender are typically symbolic rather than material.

Table 8. Policies selected for analysis as well as their respective areas of focus and relevant preceding policies

Policy	Focus	Preceding policy
Ten Years Development Plan	Economic development	Growth and Transformation Plan II; Homegrown Economic Reform Agenda
Digital Ethiopia 2025	Digital strategy	ICT Policy 2016
Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap 2018-2030	Long-term education strategy	
Education Sector Development Programme VI	Medium-term education strategy	Education Sector Development Plan V

3.4.2. Step 2 – First stage policy content analysis

This section will present the findings of the first-stage intersectional feminist policy analysis of the 10YP, Digital Ethiopia 2025, EEDR, and ESDP VI. Table 9 summarises the findings for each policy.

Table 9. Policy content analysis results of the 10YP, Digital Ethiopia 2025, EEDR, and ESDP VI. Policy have been scored on a scale of 0 to 3 for each topic, with 0 representing 'no acknowledgement of the topic in the policy', 1 being 'a little acknowledgement of the topic in the policy', 2 equating to 'some acknowledgement of the topic in the policy', and 3 being 'strong recognition of the topic in the policy'.

	10YP	Digital Ethiopia	EEDR	ESDP VI
Gender neutrality	2	2	2	2
Context	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Equality	2	1	2	2
Intersectional identities	0	0	1	1
Sociocultural underpinnings of the problem	0	0.5	0	0.5
Women as private actors	1	1	1	1
State-market control	1	0	0	2

Power analysis	1	1	1	1
Material/symbolic reform	1	1	2	2

3.4.2.1. *Gender neutrality*

Most of the policies demonstrate the gendered nature of the problems that they address. For example, the EEDR and ESDP VI use sex-disaggregated data to highlight key issues to do with enrolment at various levels of education, the 10YP presents sex-disaggregated data and goals in the ‘gender and social inclusion’ section, and Digital Ethiopia 2025 discusses the gendered nature of challenges it aims to address such as the “significantly lower female literacy rates.” There is little-to-no acknowledgement of the complex sociocultural causes of the issues the policies attempt to tackle, however. Without considering these causes, finding an approach to these gendered problems will be unlikely.

3.4.2.2. *Context*

Women are clearly visible in each policy. Sex-disaggregated data (or women-specific figures) are presented in addition to some discussion of women’s outcomes. Furthermore, people’s experiences are mostly discussed in a gendered manner, although women’s experiences are typically homogenised.

The policies do not sufficiently engage with the structural causes, gender norms and social milieu that shape daily life experiences of women. Overall, the policies briefly mention gendered cultural issues such as barriers to education, access to finance and a legal identity, the gender pay gap, and the prevalence of child marriage. However, these are discussed in very limited detail with little exploration of their causes nor of potential long-term solutions; instead, general goals are given such as gender parity in education.

3.4.2.3. *Equality*

There is a strong push for gender equality in each policy as all focus on gender and women's outcomes, even promoting equity by recognising the heterogeneity of women. The EEDR and ESDP VI both push for gender equality at all levels of schooling, with the EEDR treating women differently by stating "it is important to further strengthen the affirmative action already in place" (Teferra et al., 2018) to increase the number of female students' enrolment and female academic staff. These policies develop different approaches by recognising intersectionality in the form of class, pastoral/semi-pastoral communities, and special needs in order to achieve equity in education.

The 10YP and Digital Ethiopia 2025 also promote gender equality by pursuing equity through targeted programmes, such as "increas[ing] the number of women who are engaged in income generating activities using microfinance loans from 33% to 50%" (GoE, 2020b), and using Impact Sourcing Service Providers (ISSPs) (organisations within the tertiary and services sector with specific social objectives), to "help women enter and prevail in" Ethiopia's IT-enabled services sector (GoE, 2020a) respectively. In this process though, they largely homogenise women.

3.4.2.4. *Intersectional Identities*

The policies do little to address the multiple identities of women and the multiple oppressions a woman may face. The 10YP and Digital Ethiopia 2025 both target women as one homogeneous group, while the EEDR and ESDP VI mention intersectional identities rarely. For example, the EDSP VI mentions gender intersected with socio-economic class – "In some schools, income-generating activities (IGAs) have been established and financial and material support has been provided to needy

students (particularly economically disadvantaged female students)” – and also discussed the gender parity index (GPI) in pastoral and semi-pastoral communities. These are the only examples of intersectionality in the policies.

Across the four policies, aspects of identity, such as gender, class, region, pastoral, etc., are treated as distinct. All policies place an emphasis on one or multiple aspects of identity (with the most common being gender), but very rarely – if ever – do they acknowledge that overlapping aspects oppress women in different ways than they do individually. For example, in the ‘Gender and Social Inclusion’ section of the 10YP, there is a focus on women’s outcomes and young people’s outcomes, but no recognition of how the experiences of age and gender may intersect.

3.4.2.5. Sociocultural underpinnings of the problem

The sociocultural underpinnings of the problem each policy seeks to address are rarely mentioned – particularly regarding the gendered dimensions of the issue. The EEDR and 10YP simply do not mention the historical or cultural reasons for the gendered problems that they present. Digital Ethiopia 2025 briefly alludes to the importance of accounting for cultural barriers in programme design and implementation when addressing people’s digital skills, but does not mention what they were. Additionally, the ESDP VI briefly mentions a couple of cultural barriers women face which hinder their participation in learning (specifically IFAE (Integrated Functional Adult Education) and post-IFAE programmes, namely household responsibilities and an indirect mention of their caring responsibilities). There is no consideration of women’s economic autonomy or intra-household dynamics, and the impact these can have on equality. Ultimately, the policies fail to recognise the sociocultural underpinnings of the problems they are trying to address.

3.4.2.6. *Women as private actors*

Most policies challenge the dichotomy of men as public actors and women as private actors to some extent, though not in a way that is likely to be transformative. For example, the ESDP VI has a goal of “improve[ing] female participation in school leadership” and discusses the impact of women’s literacy on income and gender equality, while the 10YP and Digital Ethiopia 2025 place a focus on women in the workplace, such as the manufacturing industry, and in leadership and judicial roles. The EEDR meanwhile does not reference such a dichotomy. However, there is no acknowledgement of the burdens women already face through the caregiving and household roles and of the additional burden participating in development programmes may bring.

3.4.2.7. *State-market constriction*

The policies’ performances regarding how they promote women’s participation in the labour market are mixed. This is because, although some policies aim to improve women’s opportunities to engage with the labour market, women’s labour is undervalued and the sociocultural barriers to women’s involvement in the labour market are not captured. The 10YP and EEDR each exemplify this, both seeking to empower women but also failing to recognise key barriers to women engaging with policy initiatives or significant policy implications. The 10YP aims to empower women to “enable them to benefit from economic development, capacity building, and equitable participation” (GoE, 2020b) but does not acknowledge that women’s traditional roles in the household, such as caring and cooking, create barriers to fully engaging in the labour market. Furthermore, the policy does not consider that it could be exploiting women’s labour by industrialising the economy for development through

a highly-feminised industry with a significant gender wage gap (Rossi, 2020; UNIDO, 2019) and which, in the case of Ethiopia, pays its workers the lowest base wage in the world (Barrett & Baumann-Pauly, 2019). The EEDR, meanwhile, seeks to address gendered differences in vocational education, noting that women are mostly “enrolled in vocational programs traditionally considered for women, such as hospitality, health and commerce” (Teferra et al., 2018). Although the policy aims to improve women’s abilities to engage in the labour market through improved vocational education, it does not recognise the drivers of what leads women to pursue ‘traditional’ degrees. Without considering these causes, it is likely women will continue to be constrained to feminised industries within which conditions and pay are typically poor (Johnson, 2020; Teferra, 2020).

The ESDP VI is the only policy which acknowledges the care work women do and considers this in the initiatives it proposes. The policy mentions that “household responsibilities” hinder women’s ability to engage with IFAE and post-IFAE programmes, and recognises the current lack of appropriate solutions such as “child-parents joint learning programmes” and “alternative means of programmes designed for women” (FMoE, 2020). Similar considerations around designing youth and adult skills education programmes accessible to women are mentioned later in the policy. Although small, this is an acknowledgement and valuing of women’s caring roles.

3.4.2.8. Power analysis

These policies seek to shift the dynamics of the social world within which constitutive power is formed by addressing drivers of gender norm change as outlined by Marcus et al. (2015). The EEDR and ESDP VI encourage the exposure of people to new ideas through formal education; the 10YP promotes economic development

driven through feminised industries; and Digital Ethiopia 2025 endorses the inclusive spread of technology through Ethiopia. The nature of these changes – improved access to education and ICT as well as a development pathway with women at its centre – suggest that these policies promote gender equality by creating a favourable environment for strengthening women’s agency.

These improvements are not guaranteed however. Dilli et al. (2015) identified that “long-term institutions, especially religion and legal systems, are almost as important for gender equality outcomes as economic development.” Hence, while these policies may create conducive conditions for improving women’s agency in the long-term, there are many other additional factors, including caring and household responsibilities that women need to prioritise.

3.4.2.9. Material/symbolic reform

The EEDR and ESDP VI appear to be seeking material reform. While they do not have funding tied to gendered outcomes, the EESD VI has a variety of gendered key performance indicators (KPIs), such as the GPI for school enrolments, which are a key part of the monitoring and evaluation of the policy. Furthermore, the success of preceding education policies, as noted in the EEDR, indicate that the policies are well positioned to improve gender equality in education. The 10YP and Digital Ethiopia 2025, on the other hand, lack clear KPIs for monitoring and evaluating progress related to gender, with Digital Ethiopia 2025 not even having a suggested measure of success which includes women or gender. This suggests that the policies are largely symbolic with regards to their push for gender equality.

3.4.3. Step 3 – Second stage policy content analysis

This section will present the findings of the second-stage policy content analysis of the 10YP, Digital Ethiopia 2025, EEDR, and ESDP VI. Table 10 summarises the findings for each policy.

Table 10. Policy content analysis results of the 10YP, Digital Ethiopia 2025, EEDR, and ESDP VI. Policy have been scored on a scale of 0 to 3 for each topic, with 0 representing 'no acknowledgement of the topic in the policy', 1 being 'a little acknowledgement of the topic in the policy', 2 equating to 'some acknowledgement of the topic in the policy', and 3 being 'strong recognition of the topic in the policy'.

	10YP	Digital Ethiopia	EEDR	ESDP VI
Affordability	0	0.5	0	0
Availability	0.5	0	0	0
Ability	1	2	2	2
Appetite	0	0	0	0

3.4.3.1. Affordability

Affordability is only tangentially acknowledged in Digital Ethiopia 2025; this is with next-to-no consideration of gender however. The policy addresses the issues of affordability by proposing the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector (which should lead to lower prices for consumers in a free market), and through seeking to establish a subsidies scheme targeting the (undefined) vulnerable to help them afford power. Neither of these show an explicit consideration of the gendered issues of affordability of digital technologies.

3.4.3.2. Availability

There is next-to-no discussion of improving availability to ICTs with a consideration of gender across the policies. The 10YP is the only policies to broadly mention the availability of technologies, emphasising the improvement of electrical and IT infrastructure such as 'last mile connection upgrades' to improve rural power service; there is no mention of gender, however.

3.4.3.3. *Ability*

People's ability to engage with digital technologies is discussed across all policies. The EEDR and ESDP both strongly emphasise people's ability to engage with ICTs through their focus on teaching students digital skills as a key part of the national curriculum. When combined with a national push towards gender equity in education, this creates a gender equal drive to improve people's digital skills in the long-term. The 10YP and Digital Ethiopia 2025 aim to improve digital literacy across the country as an important step in the country's development. Neither of these policies explicitly focus on gender, instead proposing improving digital literacy through the education system which is moving towards gender parity. On one occasion however, Digital Ethiopia 2025 presents a gender-specific path for improving women's abilities to engage with ICTs, detailing the use of ISSPs to "help women enter and prevail in" Ethiopia's IT-enabled services sector (GoE, 2020a).

3.4.3.4. *Appetite*

People's appetites for engaging with digital technologies receives no acknowledgement throughout the suite of policies.

3.5. Discussion

The 10YP, Digital Ethiopia 2025, EEDR, and ESDP VI create a policy environment which is largely uncondusive to women's engagement with digital technology, particularly given the patriarchal hegemonic social structure of Ethiopia. The intersectional feminist policy analysis showed that few topics relevant to women's outcomes received 'some acknowledgement': being mentioned briefly with recognition of how relevant issues would impact women or wider society. For example, 'gender neutrality' was the only topic to receive 'some acknowledgement' across all policies,

maintaining some focus on the specific needs of women. Importantly however, across all topics there was no single policy which provided strong acknowledgement of a topic: not only recognising the topic and how to approach relevant issues, but also outlining the root causes of the issue and their impact. This reflects the finding of Drucza et al. (2020) that many Ethiopian policies “tend to neglect the historical, cultural, and social discriminatory legacies that affect women.”

This overall lack of the recognition and impacts of gender and gendered issues relating to digital technology likely results from the GoE’s current integrationist policy approach to gender in combination with the views of Ethiopia’s political leaders regarding women’s role in the policy process. An integrationist policy paradigm focuses on the participation of women in the policy process (Bekana, 2020), premised on the idea that women’s participation in the policy process promotes their perspectives which can then help inform policy designed to serve women’s needs. However, the lack of consideration of women’s issues relating to digital technology in these policies reflects broader findings of Holdo (2015) that deliberative processes typically serve dominant groups because marginalised groups are systematically disadvantaged in deliberation and restricted in representing their views; and specifically by Dessie (2021) who has argued that Ethiopia’s political leaders had unfavourable views regarding women’s participation in decision-making. Without genuine participation from women in the policy process and a recognition of the nation’s patriarchal norms, these policies are unlikely to promote long-term transformational change regarding women’s engagement with digital technologies.

The second-stage policy content analysis, showed that the causes of the DGD (outlined by Tyers (2020)) are rarely dealt with. Gender nuances in engagement with digital technologies is discussed only through digital literacy in national education.

Consequently, the policies have not recognised the varied and significant sociocultural drivers underlying the DGD and women's engagement with digital technology. I therefore argue that the policies implicitly regulate and constrain women's engagement with ICTs which can be exemplified through two examples of sociocultural norms which were left unacknowledged in the policies: women in roles as leaders and designers in the digital technology space (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Kuroda et al., 2019; Ponge, 2016) and women's roles in the household (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Ford, 2021; Ponge, 2016).

Ponge (2016) articulates that women are seen in Global South countries as only 'receivers' of technology, not as innovators; this results in women having little input in the design of digital technologies and content (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014). The Broadband Commission (BC) (2017) and David (2022) posit that promoting women as leaders and designers in the field of digital technology is not only an effective way of challenging social norms around women's engagement with technology, but it will also help ensure there is more content designed for women, because decision-making and content creation will not occur solely with men's worldview (Singh, 2017; UN, 2005). This is not prioritised in the policies. While the policies emphasise women in positions of leadership as important goals for gender equality, there is no mention of this in the ICT space. Given the 'leaky pipeline' mentioned by Singh (2017), including in the case of ICTs, it is unlikely for a significant gender shift to occur in the digital technology space without policy intervention. This will leave girls and women with few role models in the industry and will leave social norms largely unchallenged.

Women and girls are often responsible for unpaid household responsibilities, such as caring for children and cooking and cleaning (Ford, 2021). These roles present cultural barriers which often leave women in time poverty, not only having little free

time to engage with digital technologies (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Ponge, 2016), but being less able to become involved with interventions designed to promote women's engagement with digital technologies. By not adequately considering women's roles in the private sphere and their responsibilities can restrict women ability to use ICTs, the policies implicitly constrain women's engagement with digital technologies.

These examples show that the current set of policies are likely to struggle to close the DGD effectively because they do not address deeply embedded gendered social norms (David, 2022). Even when policymakers consciously design for inclusiveness to prevent further entrenching inequalities, without a transformative policy approach, which will be elaborated upon below, the patriarchal structures which create and reinforce the gendered norms will remain unchallenged and endure (Bekana, 2020). By failing to address sociocultural barriers to women's engagement with ICTs, these policies fail to create an environment conducive to, and thus implicitly regulate, women's engagement with digital technologies.

This case study of Ethiopia can provide lessons for other countries in the process of, or looking to begin, digital development. It shows that targeted considerations need to be made for specific populations if attempts to improve engagement with digital technologies at a population-level are to be successful. In the case of women, sociocultural norms impacting their ability to engage meaningfully with ICTs need to be recognised if governments wish to maximise the impact ICTs can have in pursuing development. Doing so will likely mean that a greater proportion of the population can use digital technologies effectively, while failing to do so risks women falling further behind and hindering development.

This case study also exemplifies how the integrationist strategy for incorporating gender issues across policy strategies can leave women's issues largely unrecognised. This suite of policies demonstrate that, while each policy deals with different aspects of gender, many of the sociocultural norms which create barriers to women's participation in education, engagement with ICTs, etc. remain unacknowledged and thus unlikely to be dealt with. This is particularly significant given the primacy of other goals such as poverty alleviation. Government officials provide additional anecdotal evidence of this, saying that Women, Youth and Children Directorates in regional government have limited capacity, further suggesting that women's issues are unlikely to be prioritised during the implementation of policies.

A transformative policy paradigm is one way to create conducive conditions to challenging the sociocultural barriers to regulating and constraining women's engagement with digital technologies in the long-term. This approach focuses on developing women's (and men's) capacity to challenge the patriarchal structures which oppress them, recognising that integrating gender equality into policy, as is done in Ethiopia, occurs without questioning the patriarchal hegemonic structures policies are created within (Bekana, 2020). This can be achieved through policy objectives such as equal access to education, equal access to paid work, and genuine political representation (Kabeer, 2005). Such policy objectives would focus on equitability, recognising differences in needs and access, rather than equality as the EEDR and ESDP VI do. By approaching policy in this way, women's barriers to engaging with digital technology, as well as the regulation and constraint put on them through patriarchal norms, can be captured and challenged and the DGD can begin to close.

3.6. Conclusion

Digital technologies are expected to play a major role in accelerating economic development and achieving the SDGs in the coming years. Moreover, digital technologies have the potential to accelerate—or decelerate—progress towards gender equality, a significant focus in development due to its positive impact on development efficiency as well as, simply, justice. The DGD, caused by gendered differences in affordability, availability, ability, and appetite, is one example of how gender inequalities can manifest with respect to engagement with digital technologies. It is a key role of policy to create conditions conducive to bridging the DGD, to ultimately promote gender equality through digital development.

A critical policy analysis using an intersectional feminist lens was conducted to investigate how the GoE's policies relating to digital technologies consider gender and gendered issues, as well as how they capture the causes of the DGD. This method was designed to expose the inconsistencies between the discourse of gender equality and the content of policies regarding gender.

I argue that, firstly, the policies insufficiently consider gender issues, with a minor focus only on the few aspects. This is likely due to the country's integrationist approach to gender in its policies as well as the unfavourable views of government officials with regards to women's position in decision-making. Secondly, the policies did little to capture the causes of the DGD. The consequence of these findings is that the policies create an environment largely unconducive to women's engagement with digital technology, particularly given the patriarchal hegemonic social structure of Ethiopia. Finally, by failing to address the underlying sociocultural causes of women's engagement with digital technologies, the policies are unlikely to promote long-term transformational change and will struggle to close the DGD.

These findings provide lessons for other countries undertaking digital development, suggesting that a transformative policy approach should be taken to fully capture and address women's barriers to engaging with digital technologies. This would give women and men the awareness and capacity to confront societal structures, driving the bridging of the DGD as well as maximising the impact of digital development. Before a transformational policy paradigm can take effect however, it should be recognised how sociocultural barriers impact aims of policies, such as improving the availability of digital technology to women in gendered public spaces like internet cafes. This conclusion builds upon previous research in this area which has focused on gender mainstreaming in ICT policy (Gapsiso & Jibrin, 2016; Olatokun, 2008; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Auriacombe, 2019).

While I acknowledge that Ethiopia is facing multiple high priority issues which may limit their capacity to enact transformative gender change, I have proposed a policy paradigm which can be combined with the current digital policy approach to make significant long-term impacts. The current gaps in research consider how these approaches can be combined, as well as the impacts of the current digital policy approach on the ground. To explore these, a theoretical study could be undertaken using case studies of previous transformative policy approaches and an on-the-ground evaluation of policy programmes could be conducted respectively. By filling these gaps, digital technology can be permeated through the country in a more fair and just way, such that women can bear the fruit of digital development.

4. The role of care in ICT4D: Exploring how mobile phones impact informal women workers' functionings through care in Ethiopia

The role of care in ICT4D: Exploring how mobile phones impact informal women workers' functionings through care in Ethiopia

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4.1. Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are widely recognised as key enablers of development, particularly in the Global South, where mobile phones and other ICTs are now becoming integrated into national and international development systems as the separation between digital ICTs and development closes (Heeks, 2020; Walsham, 2017). Within the field of ICTs for development (ICT4D), the Capabilities Approach (Sen, 1974, 1979a, 1979b) has emerged as a leading framework for conceptualising development, defining it primarily in terms of the expansion of people's freedoms to live the kinds of lives they have reason to value. Recent scholarship has extended this framework by exploring how ICTs act as generative resources and transformative conversion factors in helping people realise valued functionings (Haenssger & Ariana, 2018). Existing applications of the Capabilities Approach in ICT4D, however, remain overly individualistic, neglecting the relational, interdependent and often gendered dimensions through which capabilities are realised in everyday life.

One such overlooked dimension is care—a multifaceted, socially embedded, and deeply gendered set of practices that inform capabilities but remain under-theorised in both ICT4D and Capabilities literature. Feminist theorists like Tronto (1993) and Capabilities theorists like Hoffmann and Metz (2017) outline that care is not only a set of activities but a relational ethic that sustains social life, shapes wellbeing, and structures access to resources and opportunities. In contexts like Ethiopia, where collectivist values and communal practices are central to social life, care operates across interpersonal, institutional, and state domains, and is heavily shaped by cultural norms, gender roles, and political conditions. Despite this, care is rarely highlighted in

ICT4D evaluations, limiting our understanding of how care influences the ICT4D process.

This paper addresses this gap through a qualitative exploration of how mobile phones inform caring practices and, in turn, the achievement of valued functionings as generative inputs and transformative conversion factors among informal women workers in Megenagna Square, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. By analysing this relationship through the lens of the feminist ethic of care—an ethical framework grounded in relational ontology and a commitment to equity, and which centres care—and recognising the tendency of Western scholars and evaluators to universalise Western perceptions of care, we propose a novel evaluative approach for ICT4D to challenge the current development evaluation paradigm. In doing so, we offer a more holistic, equitable, and contextually grounded understanding of ICT4D and its impacts in the Global South, which is particularly important in front of the development backdrop which emphasises the pursuit of gender equality.

4.2. Literature Review

Development has been conceptualised numerous ways in the ICT4D literature including through the Capabilities Approach proposed by Sen (1974, 1979a, 1979b). This approach considers development as an expansion of people's freedoms and consists of two core principles: functionings and capabilities. Functionings, which include being educated, getting married, and being well nourished, are an interrelated set of 'beings and doings' which relate to an individual's wellbeing, while capabilities are the freedom to achieve, as well as the lack of external barriers to achieving, valued functionings.

To capture the role of ICTs—hereby defined as scope 1 digital ICTs like mobile phones, smartphones, laptops and the internet (Heeks, 2017)—within this development paradigm, Haenssger and Ariana (2018) canvassed the technology-augmented Capabilities Approach, shown in Figure 2, which conceptualised ICTs as multidimensional factors with generative and transformative properties. As generative inputs, ICTs act as a resource which people use to realise functionings, such as the use of mobile phones to expand people’s political participation in oppressive regimes by giving them the resources to safely expose repressive regimes and induce political change (Sen, 2010). Their role as transformative conversion factors sees them change the characteristics of other inputs in tandem with other conversion factors like environmental and individual factors. This is exemplified by mobile phones which alter inputs such as available government doctors and informal caregivers through their ability to call and seek consultations from the doctor, and the recognition that mobile phone use is affected by other conversion factors like digital literacy and the social norms and structures which inform how people communicate with doctors (Haenssger & Ariana, 2018). It is this ability to be an input which modifies other inputs which make ICTs unique in the Capabilities Approach.

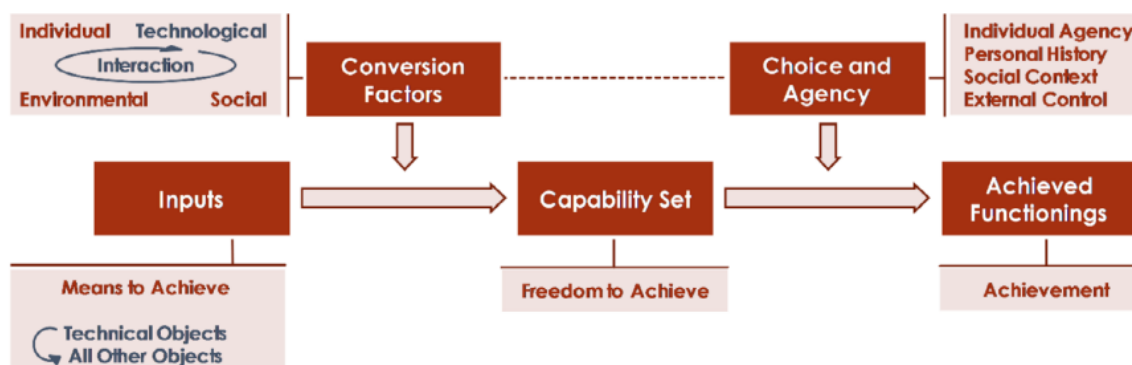


Figure 2. The technology-augmented Capabilities Approach proposed by Haenssger and Ariana (2018) and adapted from Robeyns (2005, p. 98)

The role of care in the Capabilities Approach is less clear, not least because it is such a diverse, complex and contested practice. Care is the ways in which we 'maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our environments, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex life-sustaining web' (Tronto, 1993, p. 103). This care occurs within the broader cultural institutional environment, including political, legal, and social institutions, which at once moulds society and is reinforced by society, and involves a 'bundle of practices' which are culturally defined and relevant to people's intersectional identities (Raghuram, 2016). In response to criticism that this definition is too broad, Tronto (2013a) has argued that care can be further defined to include more specific form of care nested within this broader caring practice, such as through nurturant and non-nurturant forms of caring described by Duffy (2011). Nurturant care is care for another human which is directed at the relationship with that person, while non-nurturant care involves caring for the physical world which provides a base for nurturant caring. For example, cleaning the household is a form of non-nurturant care which can provide the basis through which effective childcare can be provided at home. Finally, care also includes self-care which can only be fully achieved relationally once one recognises one's own needs for care and recognises the role of others in meeting these needs (Ward & Barnes, 2015).

The role of care in the Capabilities Approach derives from the intrinsically relational nature of capabilities as 'human beings cannot be free from their dependency upon other human beings' (Dean, 2009, p. 267). The work of Chipango (2023) and Hoffmann and Metz (2017), who consider the Capabilities Approach through Ubuntu, a communitarian ethical theory developed in Africa, exemplifies this

relational nature by firstly discussing how the realisation of capabilities can be impacted by how they affects others. They outline that a capability is not fully achieved if done so through unfriendly means, such as if one gains access to water at the expense of another's access. They also emphasise the role of the State, political interests, and infrastructure and institutional resources to acknowledge the role of power relations and relations of dependence in attaining capabilities. Using the example of white-owned agricultural businesses in South Africa who benefit from a rich water supply due to the historical diversion of water from former African 'homelands' during Apartheid, Hoffmann and Metz (2017) discuss how the realisation of capabilities by passively benefiting from the State's unfair distribution of resources—or, more significantly, dispossession of others—results in a weakened capability.

Capabilities are also intimately related to interpersonal relationships. Chipango (2023) posits the importance of solidarity in addition to freedom when conceptualising equality, arguing that people should value each other because of their capacity to commune and that the freedom to choose doesn't necessarily lead to social solidarity nor caters for the need to belong. Hoffmann and Metz (2017) discuss how the deprivation of capabilities can limit one's ability to enter relationships in which they can care for others. To illuminate this, they outline that if one is uneducated, not only does it diminish their range of employment choices, but it may also limit how they can provide for their loved ones or prevent them from helping their children learn at school.

This recognition of the interdependent nature of human life highlights the importance of care, specifically care for each other and care between the State and citizens, in fully attaining capabilities. Care lies at the heart of the Capabilities Approach to development because it is not only crucial to people realising capabilities, but to realising capabilities in ways that don't impede others.

Care is not only central to the Capabilities Approach though, but also to the Feminist Ethic of Care. The feminist ethic of care (FEC) is an ethical framework rooted in care which was developed to challenge the assumptions of Western ethical thought by proposing a relational ontology and epistemology prioritising partiality, particularity, concreteness, and a balance between rationality and emotion (Keller & Kittay, 2017). As a feminist ethic, it recognises the private and public spheres of life, premises itself on men and women being unequal in society and that these positions differ according to people's intersectional identities, promotes the consideration of the moral experiences of all, and acknowledges the potential for political change through practical actions by acknowledging that people can both resist and consent to power structures through individual actions within broader time- and context-specific social practices (Jaggar, 2001).

Through its ontology, epistemology, and feminist framing, the feminist ethic of care (FEC) is well positioned to capture this link between care and capabilities in an African context because it echoes the interdependence of life recognised by many African philosophies (Chipango, 2023; Tessema, 2021; Zamani et al., 2020). Ethiopian ethics, for example, embodies the central theme of “ābiro menori,” meaning ‘living with others’, which recognises people's interdependence and centralises relationships, and posits that our humanity is only developed when we are together (Tessema, 2021). It forms the social principles of life based on respect, mutual cooperation, and care, and thus holds parallels to FEC which make FEC useful when analysing the relationship between care and Capabilities in an Ethiopian context. It is also a particularly useful framework because, as Hoque (2024) states, the recognition of care is crucial in understanding the complex lived realities of women in the Global South and, in turn, more fully understanding the impacts of ICT4D. For example, caring responsibilities

are a cause of the digital gender divide as they can lead to time poverty, limited mobility, poor health and wellbeing, and perpetuate women's inequality (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Gondwe, 2024).

In addition to the relationships the Capabilities Approach has with both ICTs and care, there exists a nuanced relationship between ICTs and care in which ICTs can aid but also risk hindering caring relations, though this has been underexplored in the Global South. ICTs can raise caregivers' competence by improving their generalised knowledge and wellbeing or by helping caregiving teams and communities share best practice and support each other (Ganong et al., 2012; Lauriks et al., 2007; Solli et al., 2018; Zamani et al., 2020), and can improve the ability for potential caregivers to take responsibility for giving care by increasing the accessibility of care when, for example, in-person care is not an option (Ahlin, 2017). They can also, however, harm the competence of those providing care by increasing conflict among caregiving teams (Smyth et al., 2023) and between caregivers and receivers (Racz et al., 2017), increase distress for those receiving care in particular contexts like online support groups (Bender et al., 2021), and raise privacy issues when ICTs are shared (Zamani et al., 2020).

A notable unique impact of ICTs on care is that they can simultaneously increase the accessibility of caregiving services for those requiring care whilst lowering the quality of communication between the caregiver and care receiver when replacing in-person communication; this can consequently decrease the quality of care provided (Haenssger & Ariana, 2018; Tanis, 2009). Despite this potential impact on communication, Christensen (2009), Solli et al. (2018) and Tanis (2009) argue that the emotional aspects of care can still be present despite the lack of physical interaction.

This is particularly important for forms of care in which the caregiver comforts and ‘is with’ the care receiver when not physically present (Aga et al., 2008).

4.3. Methodology

4.3.1. Overview

This study was conducted in two parts: the purpose of the first was to define care in the Ethiopian context and thereby inform the interview guide and help select the research population for the second part of the study, while the second was to explore how ICTs impacted people’s engagement with care. This is visualised in Figure 3. Ethiopia was selected as the context due to its strong focus on ICT4D which has been pursued since their first ICT strategy was ratified in 2009. They are seeking to become a leader of ICT4D in East Africa (Tesfachew, 2022) while also emphasising gender equality by bringing women into the workforce.

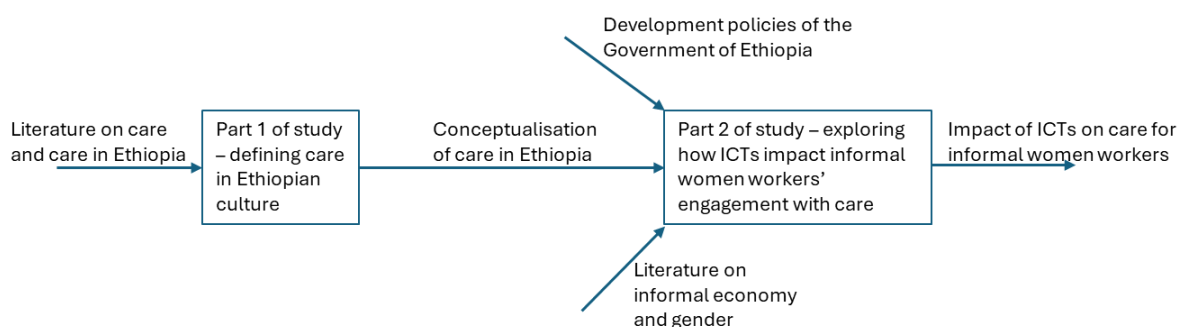


Figure 3. Diagram outlining how part 1 of the study informed part 2

The first part of the study, approved by the University of Oxford’s Central University Research Ethics Committee (SOGE-C1A-23-59), consisted of twelve gendered interviews, six each with women and men and conducted in Amharic, which took place around Meskel Square, Addis Ababa in September 2023. Gendered interviews were conducted to identify whether there was a different perception of care

between women and men given the strongly gendered norms regarding care roles in Ethiopia as well as to gather initial insights into how ICTs impacted how they engaged with care. Importantly, there is no direct translation for ‘care’ in Amharic, and thus three terms were used to capture care—each discussed separately throughout the interview—as shown in Table 11; these concepts will be merged conceptually and discussed as ‘care’ throughout this paper because participants struggled to differentiate the concepts during interviews.

Table 11. Key Amharic words used in the interview guide to capture the concept of ‘care’

Amharic noun used in interviews (associated verb)	English concept
Menkebakeb (Enkibikabe)	Care
Erdata (merdat)	Support
Digaf (magez)	Help

The second part of the study, approved by the University of Oxford’s Central University Research Ethics Committee (SOGC-C1A-24-06), involved semi-structured interviews with 25 informal women workers around Megenagna Square, Addis Ababa in November 2023. Women were chosen because they felt that care could be burdensome while men did not feel this could be the case; this difference in perceptions represented the more significant role providing care played in the lives of women. Informal women workers were chosen as the research population because, firstly, as the Ethiopian government has focused on creating employment opportunities for women, many women are now culturally expected to complete the ‘double workday,’ by completing their role as caregivers as well as fulfilling their job requirements; this may push them into the informal sector where they can work while caring for children. Secondly, women are overrepresented in Ethiopia’s informal economy, which generally comprises the poor and marginalised sections of society

who are employed with limited or no social protection. Megenagna Square was selected as the research location because of the high number of informal women workers who worked there and because several studies regarding informal employment have been conducted in the area.

A social map of Megenagna Square was developed through informal conversations with informal workers around the area to understand where the most vulnerable workers operated. We found that the vulnerability of workers was closely related to the times at which they worked or their characteristics, such as age, disability, or caring for children while working, rather than the location. For example, the most vulnerable people typically worked in the mornings from 6:00 – 7:00 am, during the middle of the day from 12:00 – 1:00 pm, or during weekends. Location was not considered significant because many informal workers in Megenagna Square did not have a set location for their business.

Following the development of the social map, purposive sampling was conducted by dividing interviews according to time, seeking to conduct at least four interviews at each of the three key times of vulnerability mentioned. During these times, random sampling was conducted by approaching the third woman vendor while looking for participants willing to be interviewed. We additionally included purposive sampling by actively seeking to interview informal women workers who had a disability or were elderly to ensure their voices could be captured through the interviews. Despite this intentionality, the illegal nature of informal work meant that few elderly women or women with disabilities engaged in this work because they were unable to flee police when the police threatened to snatch their product.

This study included limitations which provide important context for the findings. Firstly, the study was conducted within a very specific context, namely with informal women workers in Megenagna Square, Ethiopia. It is difficult, therefore, to judge the generalisability of our findings, not only across different cultural contexts where care may be enacted differently, but also across different populations such as formally employed women who may receive a greater income but also be less flexible in when they can care for their children through formalised working arrangements (Davison & Martinsons, 2016). This also related to the exposure to relatively unsophisticated ICTs informal women workers had, with most only having access to brick phones. This limited our insights into how ICTs can affect engagement with care more broadly as other ICTs could have expanded our findings; for example, online support groups are not accessible through brick phones but have been found to impact how people engage with care in the Global North (Tanis, 2009). Finally, conducting interviews in Amharic may have constrained the data collected because, although all participants could speak the language, for some, particularly migrants from other regions, Amharic was not their mother tongue. Conducting interviews in the mother tongue of the respondent would have strengthened the data because language is an essential part of conceptualisation and incorporating values and beliefs that carry cultural, social and political meanings that cannot be captured through translation (Temple & Edwards, 2002). This is especially relevant given care is a culturally specific practice.

4.3.2. Data Analysis

Once data were collected, they were translated and transcribed before then being analysed using an inductive thematic analysis methodology and coded using NVivo. They were coded reflexively, letting the codes and themes emerge from the

data through an iterative process while also actively acknowledging the expectations of the researchers and how that may impact the themes that arise.

The analysis process involved the following steps:

1. Become familiar with the data (translate and transcribe).
2. Search for patterns in the data through coding.
3. Identify initial themes.
4. Review initial themes and adapt.
5. Repeat step 4 until themes are finalised.

4.4. Results

This section will begin by outlining the findings regarding how participants conceptualised care at the interpersonal, group, and governmental level, before then moving to discuss seven themes which capture how ICTs impacted informal women workers' engagement with care.

4.4.1. Contextualising care in Ethiopia

Participants' conceptualisations of care at the interpersonal level (between individuals) were reflected through four themes, each of which agree with the literature on care in Ethiopian culture. The first of these referred to nourishing the care recipient through cooking and providing food, reflecting the findings of Aga et al. (2008). Men and women alike regularly discussed 'cook[ing] the food for them' and 'giv[ing] them food that they eat' as a means of proving care for someone. They also emphasised the importance of cleanliness and hygiene by clothing the care receiver and cleaning them and their surroundings, echoing the findings of Spinelli et al. (2023). Participants mentioned 'washing her clothes or keeping her sanitised,' washing 'their bodies, their

hairs,' and keeping 'their bed and the house... clean.' Thirdly, respondents conceptualised care to include providing emotional and psychological care, sharing ideas, and spending time with and giving attention to them, in line with the themes identified by Berhane (2020) and Chiatti (2019). Care can be 'in the form of providing ideas,' 'providing... more time and attention to someone,' or 'shar[ing] their feelings.' Finally, participants mentioned sacrificing themselves for those they're caring for, like the findings of Aga et al. (2008). They mentioned that 'sacrifice for others can be considered care,' and the importance of continuing to provide care even when it is 'draining,' with one respondent even going so far as to say they might 'lose [their] job in order to provide care for' someone.

While this often occurred between individuals, similar forms of care also took place within groups, through informal caring institutions such as edirs and ekubs. An edir is a type of social cooperative institution based on the 'mutual agreement of community members to collaborate whenever an adverse situation occur in any member of the family' (Mekonen & Asfaw, 2015). Participants outlined that when someone is sick or they have lost a family member, edirs are the institution through which they congregate and care for that person, including by providing finance, labour and emotional support at times of mourning, and being involved in the provision of different social services such as health and schooling services. An ekub is a rotating social credit institution which provides credit service to members while promoting saving habits. In these, members regularly contribute an agreed amount of money to a communal pot which is then distributed to an individual in a time of need and at a previously agreed time. It is subsequently filled again until it is either needed or the pre-agreed time is reached. Respondents discussed how they felt this was a form of care, particularly when the group prioritised a particular person to receive the money;

this differed slightly though as they also recognised that being part of an ekub relied on them fulfilling their responsibilities, and so they also recognised this partly as self-care.

Lastly, participants also felt care could be received from societal institutions such as the government. The care they received from the government differed from the themes of interpersonal care and entailed two key ideas: services and infrastructure received from the government (like water and electricity services, and hospital and healthcare services) and, most commonly, maintaining peace. Participants mentioned how they saw 'government health facilities,' government responses to emergencies, and the use of police to maintain peace and their safety as a form of care. Thus, broadly speaking, if the government could deliver on these issues, then respondents felt they were cared for by the government.

4.4.2. Transforming the ability to self-care by signalling others the need for care

Participants saw phones as a means of improving their ability to self-care, with phones acting as transformative tools for other people to provide care. Participants used their phones to signal their needs for care more easily, including indicating to others that they required care when they were bedbound and would otherwise have struggled to contact people, and when they generally needed help and support. This helped them to attain functionings such as being nourished and receiving medical care in times of need.

One respondent (F7), a single mother who had migrated from the Oromia region and had access to a brick phone, gave the example of signalling for help using her phone when she was ill. She said *'if I get seriously ill, I call someone who could*

bring me food, take me to the health facility and provide me support. And the phone can help me to call my neighbours during a need. When you are sick, you may not have energy to go to friend and ask for support. Phone makes it easy to ask for support during sickness and those times.' Another interviewee (B6), a migrant from the Oromia region with a brick phone, echoed this sentiment, explaining that *'if I am sick and want to have medicines or coffee, I can call a friend and tell them what I want.'* In this case, the respondents' phones acted as transformative conversion factors because they altered the input of informal caregivers through their ability to call and request care when they otherwise would have been unable or struggled to, thereby improving their health outcomes.

Other participants gave examples in which they used phones as transformative conversion factors for other people as inputs when they needed care more generally. One respondent (E1), a single woman from the area who had access to a smartphone outlined that her phones *'helps me to receive support and care from the other peoples. It helps me to communicate with others, especially when I need something. I use my phone and call for them and ask whatever I want and receive the thing, the thing that I want.'* Similarly, other respondents (B3 and B7) used the phone to communicate with people and receive care through being comforted. They said *'before I own a phone, like I used to go to someone to talk to or to, you know, ask for help, then now I have the phone so that I can call. Even if I want to talk for a longer time or like a long hour, I can call and someone can hear me out,'* and *'I talk to my friend over the phone when I am stressed or when I need to share my ideas or just want to talk.'* In doing so, they were able to achieve valued functionings such as communing and feeling comforted.

4.4.3. Transforming receiving a ‘blurry signal’ from others requesting care

Similarly to more easily signalling the need for care, having access to a phone gave respondents the ability to receive signals from others requesting care via phone calls or texts which allowed them to take responsibility and meet those needs. This signal for care could, however, be blurred by miscommunication due to the loss of face-to-face interactions. Phones acted as transformative inputs by transforming the social environment, specifically others, to ultimately attain the valued functioning of caring, or more broadly, communing. In doing so, however, they also acted as a transformative input by making communication between people less clear. Although participants articulated care as a valued functioning that phones help them realise, this finding must be read with consideration of the gendered social context in which care labour is expected of women. The implications of adaptive preferences in shaping such orientations toward care are further explored in the discussion section.

One respondent (F6), an unmarried migrant from the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region⁷ (SNNPR) with a brick phone who sends remittances to her parents 3-4 times per year, described how having a phone allowed her to have the needs of her loved ones brought to her attention when she is not with them. She said *‘it is good to have the phone. My father, mother, friends call me when they are in need of help. I give them money when I have it or I borrow money and give it to them when they are in critical need of money, if they require it urgently. Using the phone helps me to provide support for my family and friends.’* This is echoed by another respondent (E2), an Oromian migrant with a smartphone and who has finished high school, who stated *‘I might give care and support when I have a phone because*

⁷ This region has since been dissolved into the Sidama Region, Southwest Ethiopia Region, South Ethiopia Regional State, and Central Ethiopia Regional State.

I get information about how people are. Because I couldn't access everyone just physically, so I see communication helps me to communicate how other people are doing so I could give you higher support and care for the people who are on the phone.'

In each of these examples, the phone is acting as a transformative conversion factor by transforming other people as inputs to attain the participant's valued functioning of providing care to those close to them.

Other interviewees commented more strongly on the way that communicating through the phone could create difficulties in understanding the caring needs of others. For example, a married mother who had migrated from the Gurage region and had a smartphone (E5) discussed the difficulties this form of communication could create by explaining *'I prefer to have face to face communication because sometimes I misunderstand people's need. When you meet a person physically you understand what the real condition of that person is. So, it's much easier to understand that person's real problem other than phone communication. In phone communication it is very hard to understand the real situation of that person, you only understand what he said. So, it's better to have a communication with a person; physical communication is much better to understand this person's need.'* Another participant (B2), a single woman who owned a brick phone but could access a smartphone through her friends, similarly said *'For example if I call to my family, they will say that they are fine even when they are not. But in order to make sure and affirm their answer if I get suspicious, I will call someone who lives nearby. But face to face gives the real information.'* These examples show another dimension to phones as transformative conversion factors because, in this case, they temper the benefits of presented when phones allow one to receive signals from others to fulfil their needs.

4.4.4. Transforming the ability to spread information for group care

Phones acted as conversion factors by transforming others as inputs through the ability to quickly spread information to bring the care needs of others to the attention of third parties, such as through edirs or ekubs. This expanded respondents' capabilities in two ways: firstly, it allowed the respondent to become aware of people's needs by receiving information that would have otherwise taken them longer to receive, and secondly, it enabled interviewees to take responsibility for sharing information to many people

Using the phone as a conversion factor for other people as inputs helped attain the respondent's functioning of communing and caring for their community by making them aware of other people's needs in a timely manner. A respondent (B3), who was a married migrant with two children with a brick phone, captured this by saying *'if someone dies, one member of the edir, or if they lose someone, you know, I get that information. When someone is in mourning, we need to go there and you know, like, share our condolences. So, in order to do that, we can exchange the information, we can communicate through the phone. So, I think it's good, it can facilitate providing care for the community.'* Another interviewee (B6) supports this idea, stating *'before having phones, edir and ekub, they would have to knock at everyone's door to tell information. But now there is phone, they can just call from where they are. And when communicating without phone, it is difficult to spread the information for every member, but now you can call and tell others and others will share the information to those who they know.'* In these cases, the phone allowed the interviewees to more quickly respond to people's needs within their community and to commune, both of which are valued functionings.

Other participants discussed taking responsibility for sharing information with many people through their phone. One (E4), a single migrant from Amhara with a brick phone, talked about how people used phones to protect each other and their product from police. She said *'it helps us to spread relevant information. For instance, when the policeman or the regulator body comes to snatch my products, my aunt's friend calls for my aunties, 'Please hide your product as the policeman are coming to snatch your products,' and my aunts come and collect our products to prevent our products from snatching.'* Another participant (F8) discussed a similar idea, stating *'when I heard some information which is relevant for them, I call my neighbours and tell them about that information. That information may be about progression and safety. Using phone makes it easy to pass that information. If I want to go to by in-person and tell them that information, that makes it difficult but passing that information using phone makes it easier.'* In these scenarios, phones act as a generative input by allowing the sender to spread information to improve the safety of their friends and loved ones, a valued functioning.

4.4.5. Generating the ability to fulfil others' needs by sharing their phone

In a very specific case, various respondents mentioned how having a phone allowed them to fulfil other's requests and needs which required a phone, such as calling friends. This exemplified the generative dimensions of phones in the capabilities approach because they were their own resource which was needed to fulfil the functioning of caring for others. For example, a respondent (F5) who was a young married migrant from SNNPR who had access to a brick phone stated *'I'll give [my phone] to a person in a problem to use my phone and communicate with people. I don't like to ignore people that ask for help. Maybe the help may be providing them*

my phone.' Another respondent (E9), a married mother from SNNPR with access to a brick phone, echoed this sentiment, saying *'I always share my device especially at my business area. Many people come and ask me to give a call for somebody, and I gave my phone and call for somebody that they wanted.'* These examples show phones as a generative input in being able to achieve the valued functioning of helping others.

4.4.6. Transforming receiving aid from the government

Mobile phones also helped respondents receive aid from the government which in turn increased their means to achieve their valued functionings by increasing the pool of resources from which they could draw. One respondent (E7) described that *'of course, it helps me to communicate with the government. For instance, when the government have a given aid that comes from different donors, they give me a call and I will go there, and I will collect my aid from the government.'* Another (E10) outlined that *'it helps me for that from the government. They give me a call when the government provides us aid and support.'* In these examples, respondents' phones acted as conversion factors in transforming people's access to the social infrastructure provided by the government.

4.4.7. Generating the ability to effectively care across distance

Improving the ability to provide care across distance was the most common example of how phones impacted participants' engagement with care. Phones, in this case, were generative inputs: replacing forms of communication like letters and giving people the ability to effectively stay in contact with those they care about and provide care through the phone. For example, one respondent (F5) said *'I can contact people who live in another place and can provide them support. I may not go to their place*

physically; I discuss over phone, and I may send them money if they are in need of money, or I support them by discussing and providing them advice. Once I get information, I may visit them or send them what they require.' Another (B3) said *'before I have the phone, I have to go to where they are to make sure they're okay or find out what they need or I have to, you know, hear from others who live in that area. But now I can call them, and I can text them or they can also call me so we can communicate easily. So, it makes life easier.'* Having a phone changes the nature of being in contact with those living far away and helped participants achieved desired functionings of providing care to others and knowing the wellbeing of others.

4.4.8. Generating a lack of attention towards others

Phones acted as inputs in diverting people's attention away from others in in-person situations which caused them to be inattentive to others needs thus impacting others attainment of valued functionings. For example, one participant (B2) stated that when someone is paying attention to their phone *'they might not even notice that someone needs care. I might be calling for help, but if they are focused on their phone, it is hard for them to quickly respond to my needs.'* Another participant (E3), a married mother with a brick phone, held a similar idea, stating *'of course it affects the care and support for other. For instance, if they are addicted, they didn't give a concern or focus for you. Rather they spend their time on their phone, so it affects the care and support of the other.'* These examples show the generative dimension of mobile phones within a relational view of the capabilities approach in which they can deprive others of the attention needed to receive care.

4.5. Discussion

The findings of our study indicate that mobile phones act as both transformative conversion factors and generative inputs in helping informal women workers in Megenagna Square attain valued functionings through care. The key theme across the situations in which mobile phones acted as transformative conversion factors relates to how they converted other people as inputs into attaining functionings. In transforming the ability to self-care by signalling others the need for care, to receive a signal from others requesting care, and to spread information for group care, the findings highlight the interdependence between people's lives, expanding upon the findings of Smith et al. (2011) who describe mobile phones as an important tool in enabling and strengthening social networks. This interdependence, which is strengthened through mobile phones, directly led to the attainment of valued functionings such as being comforted by others, receiving nourishment, and communing. Additionally, it better enabled respondents to help others achieve their functionings through caring practices which was itself a valued functioning. Participants' responses often placed a central importance on care and the value they felt in providing care for others. While it is difficult to distinguish whether this is because they are fulfilling their societally expected caring roles or because they truly value caring for others as a functioning, or both, the discussion which saw providing care in a positive light suggests it is a valued functioning and thus a development outcome; this reflects the discussion of Hoque (2024), building upon the work of other feminist writers like Narayan (1989) and Bulbeck (1998), which argued that while Western feminists can see caring roles and expectations as a prison, non-Western worldviews, such as those in the Global South, may confer high value and appreciation toward

these roles which can bring women joy and make them feel burdened simultaneously. Therefore, the use of mobile phones led to development outcomes through care.

4.5.1. Care, Gendered Expectations, and Agency

While the findings demonstrate that mobile phones enabled the attainment of valued functionings through care, interpreting care as a development outcome requires careful reflection on the gendered social context in which caring practices are embedded. In patriarchal societies, expectations surrounding who provides care labour are deeply gendered and often internalised by women themselves. As feminist scholars have argued, preferences for certain roles or activities cannot always be understood as freely chosen but may instead reflect adaptive preferences formed under conditions of structural constraint (Khader, 2011; Nussbaum, 2000a). From this perspective, women's expressed valuation of caring practices may partly arise from long-standing social norms that position care as women's moral responsibility, rather than from unconstrained choice alone.

Applying the lens of adaptive preferences to the present findings invites a cautious reading of women's embrace of care as a valued functioning. Participants consistently articulated satisfaction and meaning in providing care to others, facilitated by mobile phone access; these orientations toward care may also reflect accommodation to gendered expectations regarding caregiving and responsibility for others' wellbeing, however. Recognising the role of adaptive preferences does not invalidate women's accounts, but rather situates them within the social structures that shape what is desirable and achievable. In this sense, mobile phones may not only enable the realisation of valued functionings, but also reinforce existing gendered divisions of care by making women more accessible and responsive to others' needs.

Equally, interpreting these findings solely through adaptive preferences risks understating women's agency and reproducing overly deterministic accounts of gendered behaviour. To address this tension, Kabeer's (1999) concept of relational agency provides a useful complementary lens. Relational agency emphasises that agency is negotiated within relationships, social norms, and power structures, rather than exercised in isolation. From this perspective, women's caring practices can be understood as active, meaningful engagements with the social world, even when they occur within constrained circumstances.

These findings, then, suggest that women used mobile phones to navigate and negotiate care obligations relationally: responding to requests for help, assessing others' needs, mobilising resources, and balancing competing demands. These practices reflect neither pure compliance nor free choice, rather they suggest situated forms of agency exercised within interdependent social relations. Mobile phones mediated these relationships by enabling communication, coordination, and responsiveness, thus shaping how care was enacted and experienced. In this way, care emerges as both socially expected and actively lived, simultaneously shaped by gendered norms and imbued with personal meaning.

Combining these lenses of adaptive preference and relational agency allow care to be understood as a valued functioning that is neither entirely imposed nor entirely freely chosen. Instead, women's preferences toward care are formed and enacted through ongoing negotiation within gendered social contexts. This interpretation strengthens the development claims of the study by acknowledging the structural conditions under which care is valued, while still recognising women's capacity to act, make meaning, and pursue wellbeing for themselves and others through caring practices facilitated through mobile phone use.

Having established care as a valued functioning that is simultaneously shaped by gendered expectations and enacted through relational agency, the discussion now turns to the broader implications of these findings for ICT4D. In particular, the analysis considers how recognising care as a central mechanism through which ICTs contribute to development challenges dominant, individualised accounts of ICT4D impacts. By foregrounding interdependence, relationality, and caring practices, the findings invite a re-examination of how development outcomes are conceptualised, evaluated, and valued in ICT4D research and practice.

With regards to phones acting as generative inputs for informal women workers in attaining functionings, the overarching theme of these findings was how ICTs informed caring practices and in turn the realisation of functionings. In being able to provide their phone to help someone else's specific needs or to provide aspects of care while not in person, these new caring practices were able to fulfil the valued functionings of both the care giver, who valued communing and providing care to others, and the care recipient, who had their needs fulfilled. Of course, there is the exception of phones diverting attention away from others and consequently their caring needs. This suggests that people's functionings achieved using their phone are not fully realised if they are unable to pay attention to others in needs; the distinction between people unable and unwilling to pay attention to other's needs is important because the former implies a lack of agency while the latter recognises the user's agency, though both cause functionings to not be fully realised. These findings evince the direct relationship between mobile phones and development through care and again highlight the importance of interdependence between people and their capabilities.

These findings elucidate a nuanced relationship between ICTs, care, and development which suggest that it is important to explore caring impacts in ICT4D. In contexts where interdependency and care are fundamental parts of people's worldview, like in Ethiopia (Tessema, 2021) and in many African contexts (Chipango, 2023; Zamani et al., 2020), the consideration of these impacts is particularly salient. Such a worldview suggests that the contribution of ICTs to development through care is much more than an additional set of outcomes to be considered, rather they are a crucial set of outcomes central to people's lives and consequently to their development outcomes. For example, Zamani et al. (2020) found that ICTs were used as part of the sharing and collectivism which were "critical factors in the wellbeing of caregivers in Malawi, which is in contrast to what we have come to know in the Global North." Fully appreciating these findings and this relationship requires a contextual understanding of what development means, appreciating that Western values are not universal when considering the impacts of ICTs on capabilities and functionings. Western scholars may, for example, problematise the findings of Zamani et al. (2020) by saying that, although ICTs have helped respondents—of whom 90% involved in focus group discussions were women—fulfil their unpaid caring roles, these reflect women's imprisonment in gender norms defined by patriarchal structures. However, this view potentially disregards relevant contextual perspectives which can show a greater appreciation for caring roles Narayan (1989) and feel they can simultaneously bring joy while also feeling burdensome (Hoque, 2024).

To develop a more holistic view of ICT4D outcomes, the exploration of caring impacts in ICT4D should not just be restricted to how ICTs are used, but also to more complex impacts such as how their individualised benefits can spillover to others through caring relationships to. For example, when Smith et al. (2011) reviewed

evidence regarding the impacts of mobile phones in strengthening social, economic, and governance networks across the Global South, their analysis was mostly restricted to the individual through a discussion of reducing transaction costs associated with markets, expanding market boundaries, and improved service access and efficiency of government services. Despite acknowledging the relationality of capabilities, there was little recognition of the interdependence between people which led to unconsidered impacts. For instance, while they recognised evidence that mobile phones increased business incomes through improved access to markets, they could have extended their analysis by considering how this additional income was used; this is particularly relevant for women business owners who typically spend more money on household expenditure or children compared with men (Carranza et al., 2018), which can in turn impact the functionings of those in the household such as increased access to education. As another example, Hasan et al. (2022) explored the link between ICT usage and freedom among Indigenous communities in Bangladesh and found that ICT use was positively and significantly related to political freedom, economic freedom, social opportunities, and protective security. These findings could have been more holistically investigated through an exploration of caring relationships among respondents by, for example, researching how increased economic freedom and social opportunity, like gendered attitudes, affected people dependent on survey respondents; such a relationship was identified by Bliznashka et al. (2021) across sub-Saharan Africa where increased access to resources and more progressive attitudes toward wife beating led to an increase in early learning opportunities for children. For each of these examples, we see cases where a consideration of care and caring relationships could have benefitted the analysis by more fully understanding the impacts of ICTs on people's capabilities.

To fully appreciate the developmental implications of these findings, we must consider how care—and the relational practices it entails—are accounted for in ICT4D evaluation. The role of care is not merely incidental to development outcomes but, as shown above, a core mechanism through which valued functionings are realised. This raises important questions about whether current evaluation paradigms are equipped to capture such impacts and, if not, what an alternative might look like.

Care as a lens for analysis provides a valuable opportunity to better understand the complex impacts of ICT4D, especially those arising from people's interdependence. It encourages attention to unintended and relations outcomes—such as those shaped by the entanglement of private and public spheres—which are often overlooked in traditional evaluations. This kind of analysis can support more informed programme designs and funding decisions, aligning with calls for complexity responsiveness in development evaluation (Bamberger et al., 2017). Additionally, it has the potential to shape more contextually sensitive digital policies that account for relations of power across society (Greenswag, 2019), ideally enhancing the benefits of ICT4D. For example, Ferritto (2024) ed how a lack of awareness of caring norms in Ethiopia's digital policies contributes to the digital gender divide, thus limiting the benefits of ICT4D. As such, emphasising care and caring relationships offers a viable first step toward a more holistic and relationally grounded understanding of ICT4D.

Furthermore, because care is a heavily gender practice, analysing ICT4D through this lens opens the possibility for more equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluations. The feminist ethic of care is used by some feminist thinkers to reconceptualise individuals as enmeshed in caring relationships—with others and with institutions—where power dynamics are made visible (Greenswag, 2019; Hankivsky, 2004; Robinson, 2011; Tronto, 1995). By redrawing the line between the public and

private spheres of life, this perspective challenges the gendered distribution of caring labour, a key driver of the digital gender divide (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Ford, 2021). This is crucial, especially in development settings where early adopters of ICTs—often those already privileged—disproportionately bear the fruits of ICT4D (Ferritto, 2024). A care-focused approach thus promotes a more just and inclusive understanding of ICT4D outcomes.

Despite this potential, the current development evaluation paradigm remains poorly suited to recognising such relational and gendered impacts. Dominated by donor accountability imperatives, conventional evaluation approaches emphasise financial efficiency, effectiveness, and predefined outputs over emergent or context-specific outcomes. This is reflected in the practices of major development actors like FCDO (2023), USAID (2020) and UNEG (2016), whose focus lies on decision-oriented, results-based frameworks rooted in Global North epistemologies. For instance, in the evaluation of the Digital Financial Services in Sierra Leone project, the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF, 2022) focused heavily on quantitative indicators such as percentage increases in financial inclusion and economic growth, thus leaving little room for relational impacts or care-related outcomes.

To more appropriately capture the complex and relational impacts of ICT4D, especially those mediated through care, a shift in the dominant evaluation paradigm is needed. This shift would embrace methodologies that are responsive to complexity by recognising people's relationality and foregrounding the lived experiences of participants and contextually embedded meanings of phenomena (Hoque, 2024), reflecting the view of Oxfam GB (2023) following their review of a decade's worth of impact. It would also require a loosening of donor control in favour of local voices and epistemologies that may conceptualise key phenomena like time, space, gender and

work different (Smith, 2021). Existing efforts to achieve this include ‘culturally responsive evaluation’ and ‘Made in Africa’ approaches, which draw from diverse value systems, such as Chinese, African, and Indigenous, and challenge Western universalism (Chilisa, 2015; Fish, 2022).

Building on this momentum, we propose that approaches rooted in the feminist ethic of care offer an additional—and currently underdeveloped—pathway for shifting the evaluation paradigm. FEC, with its relational worldview and centralisation of care, is naturally complexity-responsive and gender-aware. It shares epistemological affinities with many African philosophies such as Ubuntu (Chipango, 2023), uMunthu (Zamani et al., 2020), and ābiro menori (Tessema, 2021), all of which centre interdependence, reciprocity, and the moral value of care. Because FEC prioritises partiality, situated knowledge, and attentiveness to power, it is uniquely positioned as a compelling response to the call of Bamberger et al. (2017) for new evaluation approaches that are simultaneously equity-focused as well as complexity- and gender-responsive.

We believe that such a shift in the dominant development evaluation paradigm would benefit all stakeholders. Firstly, it would allow evaluations to capture a broader range of indirect and emergent outcomes, including those arising through caring relationships. Secondly, it would promote the interests and values of local communities alongside those of donors. Taken together, this could empower decision-makers with more complete and contextually grounded evidence, supporting more ethical, effective, and inclusive development programming.

4.6. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have demonstrated the central role of care in shaping the developmental impacts of ICTs, particularly in contexts marked by interdependence, gendered social roles, and collectivist worldviews. By analysing how mobile phones facilitate the attainment of valued functionings through caring practices among informal women workers in Ethiopia, we reveal the limitations of individualistic, outcome-driven approaches that dominate current ICT4D evaluation paradigms. Instead, we propose a shift toward relational, complexity-responsive, and gender-aware frameworks—ones capable of capturing the emergent and often invisible outcomes that arise through people's caring relationships.

Consequently, we offer several important academic contributions. First, we built upon arguments for a relational Capabilities Approach by foregrounding care as a central mechanism through which development outcomes are realised, extending the Capabilities Approach by highlighting how valued functionings emerge relationally rather than individually. Secondly, by incorporating FEC, we introduced a novel lens to evaluation that is gender-responsive, equity-focused and open to complexity, contributing to efforts to reconceptualise development through interdependence and contextually appropriate epistemologies. We also challenged the limitations of the current dominant ICT4D evaluation paradigm, arguing that it is ill-equipped to capture emergent outcomes—especially those related to care and relational wellbeing. In response, we advocate for complexity-responsive and culturally grounded approaches, like 'Made in Africa' approaches and culturally responsive evaluation, while proposing that approaches centring care, inspired by FEC, could complement and enrich this landscape. Finally, we contributed to the decolonisation of development discourses by aligning FEC with African philosophies like Ubuntu, uMunthu and ābiro

menori, emphasising that caring roles may hold different value and meanings in different contexts which clash with their oppressive framing in Western feminist thought. Together, these contributions offer a more holistic, equitable, and contextually relevant framework for understanding and evaluating ICT4D impacts in the Global South.

There are several directions upon which future research could build upon this work, the first of which is to further develop the evidence base for the developmental impacts of ICTs through care. This includes including broader populations such as introducing gender diversity and formally employed populations, expanding the ICT context beyond mobile phones, and conducting cross-cultural studies such as in different regions of Ethiopia or different countries entirely. Furthermore, researchers could develop and test an evaluation tool operationalising the FEC in ICT4D settings. This could then be compared with evaluations conducted according to the dominant evaluation paradigm to better understand how this approach could inform our understanding of ICT4D practically.

5. The Care Approach to evaluation: Drawing from the Feminist Ethic of Care to Evaluate Gendered Outcomes in the Global South

The Care Approach to evaluation: Drawing from the Feminist Ethic of Care to Evaluate Gendered Outcomes in the Global South

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5.1. Introduction

Evaluation plays a powerful role in shaping the direction of development interventions—informing what gets funded, whose voices matter, and how programme ‘success’ is defined. In the Global South, where development contexts are often marked by patriarchal structures (like the Global North) and deeper power asymmetries, evaluative processes carry especially high stakes. They do not simply reflect the value of interventions; they shape which values are seen as legitimate.

Programme evaluation is typically defined as the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed intervention’s relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability (OECD, 2024 - see Box 1). Yet in practice, evaluation is deeply contested, both as a technical process and as a political one (AfrEA, 2021; Chen, 2015; UNEG, 2016).

“The systematic and objective assessment of a planned, ongoing or completed intervention, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Evaluation also refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of an intervention.

An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into decision-making processes.” (OECD, 2024;

Box 1. Definition of evaluation provided by the OECD-DAC (2024)

Across the literature, several critiques have emerged regarding the practice of evaluation in the Global South. These include an overreliance on experimental methods, an accountability bias toward donors rather than communities, insufficient attention to complexity and unintended outcomes, and a lack of evaluative capacity (including the cultural and structural competencies needed to assess programmes in highly unequal settings (Dighe & Sarode, 2019). These issues are compounded by

systemic vulnerabilities, less predictable contexts, and often unstable institutions (Ofir, 2013). The result is that evaluations can fail to hold power to account and may unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities (Sénit & Biermann, 2021).

Conventional evaluative approaches understood here as sets of guiding principles, values, and foci that shape evaluation design and practice (Mertens & Wilson, 2018)—are often inadequate for addressing these challenges holistically. While some, such as utilisation-focused evaluation (Patton, 2008), promote the use of findings for decision-making, they may neglect the sociopolitical dynamics or lived experiences of programme participants. Others may centre inclusion and engagement but underplay issues of gender or systemic power. In response, newer approaches have emerged, such as those under the 'Made in Africa' evaluation agenda, which advocate for methodologies rooted in local worldviews and epistemologies while adapting existing tools for contextual relevance (Chilisa, 2015; Fish, 2022).

This paper contributes to this evolving landscape by proposing the Care Approach to evaluation. Drawing on feminist ethics of care (FEC) and integrating key principles from both feminist and responsive evaluation, the Care Approach offers a framework that is context-sensitive, complexity-aware, and explicitly committed to gender equity. It is particularly well-suited to evaluations conducted in patriarchal societies, where development programmes often risk reinforcing the very inequalities they seek to challenge (van der Harst et al., 2023).

The Care Approach centres care as both an ethical and evaluative lens. It guides evaluators to be responsive not only to power and cultural context, but also to relational dynamics, emotional wellbeing, and caregiving burdens often overlooked in conventional evaluations. To illustrate its distinctiveness, the paper compares it with

culturally responsive evaluation (CRE), an approach similarly rooted in responsive evaluation and committed to inclusion and epistemic justice (Kushnier et al., 2023).

5.2. Conventional approaches to evaluation

Evaluative approaches are grounded in values and theory and guide how evaluations are conducted, from framing questions to selecting methods and interpreting findings (Mertens & Wilson, 2018). They are often developed in response to the limitation of dominant evaluation paradigms. For instance, responsive evaluation emphasises social and epistemic justice, by engaging with stakeholder perspectives, particularly those who have been historically marginalised (Visse et al., 2015), while feminist evaluation promotes advocacy, equity, and attention to gendered outcomes (Brisolara, 2018). Each of these approaches brings valuable tools to evaluation practice, but also has its own limitations. No single approach can fully address the diverse purposes and contexts of evaluations, which is why evaluators must align their choice of approach with the values and goals guiding their work.

There are many approaches from which evaluators can choose depending on their evaluative aims. These include feminist approaches, which challenge the structural and intersectional nature of inequality with gender as a starting point (Brisolara, 2018); responsive approaches, which seek to understand how programmes affect and are shaped by power dynamics within communities; and utilisation-focused approaches, which emphasise producing findings that are useful for decision-makers. Major international organisations, such as the UK's FCDO, USAID, and the UN Evaluation Group, implicitly promote a utilisation-focused approach through their emphasis on useful results, impartiality and objectivity, and methodological rigour (FCDO, 2023; UNEG, 2016; USAID, 2020). While widely adopted, these values often

rest on implicit assumptions about linear causality, rational action, and predictable outcomes. For example, USAID (2022) assumes that “people behave rationally in response to the conditions they face, that systems tend to be organised in logical ways, and that investments should lead to predictable outputs”

The need for a shift is increasingly being recognised within the sector. Oxfam GB (2023), after reviewing a decade of programme evaluations, concluded that future evaluations must more explicitly engage with power dynamics and issues of ownership, while better accounting for complexity. This reflects broader trends in the field. As Bamberger et al. (2017, p. 75) note, “As development *initiatives become more complex, conventional evaluation approaches are no longer able to fully evaluate how multiple interventions funded, designed and implemented by multiple stakeholders, and operating in complex environments, contributed to observed changes in multiple (intended and unintended) outcomes. Under these increasingly common scenarios, it becomes necessary to find new evaluation approaches that are “complexity-responsive” and equity-focused and gender responsive.*”

While many approaches can lead to similar outcomes, it is the underlying values—rather than the surface-level methods—that determine their relevance and utility. Some organisations are already moving in this direction. For example, the African Evaluation Association advocates for approaches rooted in African-relational theory and cultural value systems that reflect the lived realities and worldviews of communities in the Global South (Chilisa et al., 2015; Fish, 2022). These initiatives recognise that culture shapes people’s beliefs and behaviours, and thus how they experience programmes.

This is especially important when evaluating gendered outcomes in patriarchal settings – including contexts which have historically been the focus of development programmes (UNDP, 2023). Here, evaluators must attend to the evolving dynamics of gender relations, including the risk that well-intentioned programmes may reinforce inequalities or receive backlash from men (Weber et al., 2019). Feminist evaluation brings a vital focus on gender and advocacy but often lacks tools for navigating complexity. It may also be politically sensitive in some settings, where the term ‘feminist’ and its theoretical framing may be contested or rejected (Podems, 2018). Responsive evaluation, by contrast, is well suited to navigating complexity and power dynamics but often lacks a sustained gender or advocacy orientation.

What is needed is not simply a blend of these two approaches, but a new way of combining their strengths in method and value, guided by a distinct epistemological lens. This paper proposes the Care Approach—an evaluative approach grounded in FEC. FEC is particularly well suited to evaluation: care is a universal yet deeply contextual experience; it is embedded in both public and private life; its unequal distribution is central to gendered oppression; and its practices mirror those of evaluation in their attentiveness and responsiveness.

By drawing on the principles of feminist and responsive evaluation but grounding them in the epistemological values of FEC—context, partiality, concreteness, and emotion—as shown in Figure 4, the Care Approach offers a principled, complexity-aware, and equity-driven alternative. It is designed to respond to the limitations of dominant evaluation practices in the Global South while explicitly addressing gendered power structures. The remainder of this paper sets out the epistemological foundations and operational principles of this approach and illustrates how it can inform the design and conduct of more just, context-sensitive evaluations.

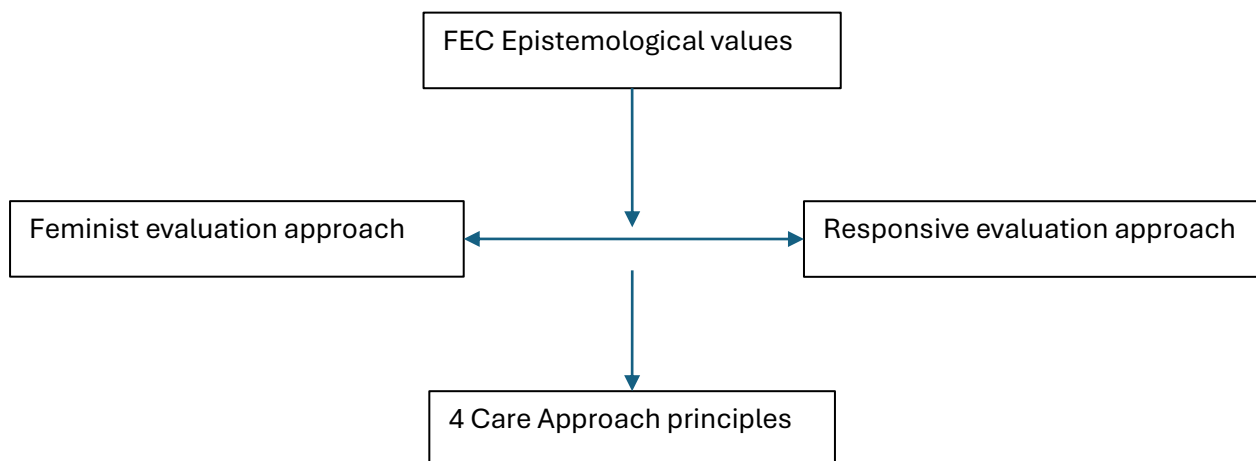


Figure 4. Diagram of how the FEC epistemological values inform how the feminist evaluation and responsive evaluation approaches combine, and how this develops the four Care Approach principles

5.3. Feminist evaluation

Feminist evaluation emerged to challenge dominant evaluation paradigms by placing gendered power relations at the centre of evaluative inquiry. Drawing from feminist theory and research, it holds that evaluations are inherently political and should aim to promote social justice. This means examining how knowledge is produced, whose perspectives are legitimised, and what kinds of actions evaluation enables (Brisolara & Seigart, 2012). It emphasises the positionality of the evaluator, the political implications of evaluation design, and the importance of producing knowledge that is meaningful and credible to marginalised groups (Brisolara, 2014).

Central to feminist evaluation are eight interlinked tenets, which make it both politically engaged and methodologically flexible, able to be adapted across a range of contexts and feminist traditions (Brisolara, 2014):

- Gender inequity is one manifestation of social injustice.
- Knowledge is culturally, socially, and temporally contingent.

- Knowledge is a powerful resource that serves an explicit or implicit purpose. Knowledge should be a resource harnessed by the people who create, hold, and share it.
- Evaluation is a political activity; practitioners' personal experiences, perspectives, and characteristics come from and lead to political stances. Evaluations and their contexts contain asymmetrical power relationships.
- Research methods, institutions, and practices are social constructs. These have historically been dominated by patriarchal ideology.
- There are multiple ways of knowing, some of which have been privileged by those in positions of power.
- Discrimination based on gender is systemic and structural. It is impacted by intersectional factors.
- Action and advocacy are morally and ethically appropriate responses of an engaged feminist evaluator because action is the purpose of knowledge.

This adaptability is reflected in the range of feminist perspectives and methods evaluators have employed. For example, Campbell et al. (2014) used a critical feminist lens and mixed methods to evaluate post-assault care for adolescent sexual assault survivors, prioritising trauma-informed recruitment by building trustful relationships. Similarly, Haley (2019) used a black feminist lens to examine the killing of Eulia Love by police, arguing for intersectional analysis in evaluation that resists reducing power to a single axis such as gender.

While feminist evaluation is uniquely positioned to challenge gendered power structures and promote advocacy, it is less attuned to the dynamics of complexity or

the unintended outcomes that often emerge in development contexts. Moreover, its activist stance may clash with the emphasis on neutrality or objectivity still prized by many donors and institutions (UNEG, 2016). Responsive evaluation addresses these limitations. Rooted in a relational ontology, it foregrounds stakeholder deliberation and is well suited to exploring complex, emergent programme dynamics (Abma, 2005). Rather than advocating for particular views, responsive evaluation positions the evaluator as a facilitator of inclusive dialogue across diverse perspectives.

5.4. Responsive evaluation

Responsive evaluation developed as a rejection of the assumption that evaluators can determine stakeholder priorities in advance (Freeman, 2018). It recognises evaluation as a relational practice, where judgement arises through dialogue and lived experience (Hamington, 2018). Central to this approach is the belief that mutual understanding among stakeholders should be fostered through a deliberative process moderated by the evaluator.

In practice, responsive evaluation follows three core values. First, evaluative criteria are derived through conversations with stakeholders, with particular attention to 'silent voices,' those traditionally excluded from formal decision-making (Abma, 2005). Second, it embraces plurality: evaluation design is emergent and responsive to diverse social conditions and stakeholder needs. Third, it emphasises respectful deliberation, encouraging stakeholders to share power and engage with each other's perspectives. Here, disagreement is not seen as failure but as an opportunity for learning and transformation.

These values are exemplified in a responsive evaluation of residential elderly care in the Netherlands by Baur et al. (2010). The study investigated whether client councils, comprising residents, family members, and volunteers, had a voice in policy

deliberations with local managers. During the initial five months, the evaluator used participant observation and group interviews to surface stakeholders' concerns. While client councils felt excluded from decision-making, managers saw them as obstructive. These insights informed subsequent focus groups and storytelling workshops held separately with each group, which revealed distinct priorities: councils valued daily life improvement for residents, while managers focused on long-term strategic planning. Finally, the evaluator facilitated a dialogue session that, by leveraging trust build over the process, enabled mutual respect and the formulation of a shared agenda for practical improvements.

Such processes reflect responsive evaluation's strength in capturing complexity. By allowing evaluative focus to emerge through participant perspectives, it supports the exploration of both intended and unintended outcomes—including those outside the original scope of the programme. It also surfaces the relational and political dynamics that shape implementation through respectful deliberation.

However, responsive evaluation may fall short in contexts marked by significant power asymmetries, such as in patriarchal societies, where marginalised groups may be unable or unwilling to speak freely. In these instances, the deliberative process alone may be insufficient to ensure equity. Here, feminist evaluation can play a complementary role. Its emphasis on advocacy and explicit attention to systemic gendered inequalities can help elevate voices that might otherwise remain unheard. For example, in settings where social norms restrict women's public participation, feminist evaluation encourages evaluators to recognise power disparities and, where appropriate, advocate for marginalised perspectives.

Together, these approaches offer complementary strengths. Responsive evaluation brings a sensitivity to complexity, stakeholder pluralism, and responsive learning. Feminist evaluation contributes an explicit normative stance, a focus on gendered power relations, and a commitment to action. Their integration—guided by FEC—underpins the Care Approach proposed in this paper.

5.5. The Feminist Ethic of Care

Feminist ethics emerged to challenge the masculinist assumptions underlying much of Western ethical thought, particularly its emphasis on individualism, abstraction, universality, rationality, and impartiality (Keller & Kittay, 2017). In contrast, feminist theorists advanced a relational ontology that sees individuals as constituted through their relationships with others, and argued that moral decisions often arise from interdependence and dialogue rather than abstract reasoning (Keller, 1997). Accompanying this shift in ontology was a new epistemological orientation, which emphasised concreteness, partiality, particularity, and the integration of emotion alongside rationality (Keller & Kittay, 2017).

One of the most influential expressions of these ideas is the ethic of care, developed in response to the neglect of private sphere experiences in dominant ethical frameworks, such as parenting, household labour, and caregiving for the disabled, elderly, and sick (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). As care ethics evolved, scholars increasingly recognised the need to interrogate who defines care, under what conditions, and in whose interests. The concept of care itself is contested, entangled with questions of power, dependency (Narayan, 1995), and the construction of the ‘other.’

Responding to these complexities, feminist theorists have argued that those who receive care must be central in defining its meaning and scope (Cockburn, 2005;

Davy, 2019). Among the many definitions of care, the one adopted in this paper is from Joan Tronto (1993), who characterises care as both a relational and sociopolitical practice. Tronto defined care as the ways in which we “maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our environments, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex life-sustaining web.” This understanding positions care not just as a set of personal acts but as a system of interdependent practices embedded in broader political, legal, and institutional structures.

To account for the multiplicity of meanings and practices associated with care, Raghuram (2016) conceptualises care as a “bundle of practices” that vary across cultural contexts and intersecting identities. Duffy (2011) further distinguishes between nurturant and non-nurturant forms of care – those directed at one’s relationship with another and those directed at the material world that sustains nurturant care, respectively. Together, these perspectives recognise care as deeply situated, politically charged, and reflective of complex social arrangements.

This broader understanding of care laid the groundwork for the development of the FEC, which explicitly connects ethical reasoning to systemic gender inequalities. For an ethical framework to be considered feminist, Jaggar (2001) proposes it must meet four criteria:

- It must consider the private sphere.
 - It must attend to the moral experiences of women and men.
 - It must acknowledge that gendered inequalities are structural, systemic, and intersect with other forms of oppression, such as ethnicity, sexuality, and caste; and
-

- It must recognise the possibility of political resistance and subordination through situated, context-specific action, and that practical action is the basis for change.

These criteria render FEC especially relevant for evaluative work where gendered power hierarchies remain deeply entrenched. For instance, in many patriarchal societies, inequalities in the private sphere—such as the division of unpaid care work—are tightly linked to inequalities in the public sphere, including barriers to employment or leadership (ESDC, 2022; Ferrant et al., 2014). These, in turn, can diminish women’s autonomy in both domains (Moos, 2021). Care ethics enables us to see how power operates across these interlocking spheres and how evaluation, when grounded in feminist values, can play a role in both recognising and challenging these dynamics.

5.6. The Care Approach

5.6.1. Overview and Rationale

This section introduces the Care Approach, an evaluative approach designed to address systemic shortcomings in how evaluations are conducted in the Global South—particularly in contexts shaped by patriarchal gender dynamics. Grounded in FEC and informed by both feminist and responsive evaluation, the Care Approach is a principled framework for complexity-responsive, equity-driven, and context-sensitive evaluation. Below, I outline its epistemological foundations, key principles, and the specific ways it responds to four major limitations in dominant evaluation practice.

Drawing on FEC as well as feminist and responsive evaluation approaches, the Care Approach is built upon four key principles:

- Consideration of caring relationships,
- Collective acknowledgement and responsibility,
- Community wellbeing, and
- Care for evaluation practice.

These principles are underpinned by four epistemological values derived from FEC:

- Context and particularity,
- Partiality to marginalised voices,
- Concreteness as lived, embodied knowledge, and
- Emotions as a complement to rationality.

Taken together, however, the principles and epistemological values help evaluators confront systemic injustices, recognise complexity, and centre marginalised experiences—particularly in gendered terms. While each component reflects values seen in existing approaches like feminist or responsive evaluation, it is their combination and grounding in care that make the Care Approach uniquely equipped to address the following limitations commonly seen in evaluations conducted in the Global South: (1) methodological bias toward experimental methods; (2) accountability bias towards the donor; (3) neglect of complexity and unintended consequences; and (4) lack of evaluative capacity (see Table 1). The Care Approach addressed these limitations by:

- Encouraging context-sensitive, community-driven methods that reflect lived realities (1).
 - Shifting the evaluator’s accountability toward beneficiaries and their definitions of value (2).
-

- Attending to complex and relational outcomes and recognising the entanglement of the private and public spheres (3); and
- Prioritising cultural competency, emotional reflexivity, and evaluator wellbeing (4).

Moreover, the Care Approach is especially suited for evaluating programmes that aim to promote gender equity. It helps evaluators interrogate how programmes intersect with existing gendered norms and caregiving burdens, and whether such interventions unintentionally reinforce the very inequalities they aim to address.

One existing evaluative approach that shares key commitments with the Care Approach is culturally responsive evaluation (CRE). Developed primarily by Stafford Hood, CRE emerged from the integration of culture and cultural differences with responsive evaluation (Hood et al., 2015; Hood & Mathison, 2005). It rejects the idea of 'culture-free' evaluation by positioning culture as central to evaluation design, implementation, and interpretation. Core themes of CRE include the use of participatory and collaborative methodologies, recognition of diverse epistemologies and ontologies, awareness of power dynamics, and a strong emphasis on the cultural competence and reflexivity of the evaluation team (Chouinard & Cram, 2020; Hood et al., 2015; Kushnier et al., 2023). While the Care Approach shares several of these values, it extends beyond them by explicitly addressing gendered power relations, the entanglement of public and private spheres, and the ethical mandate of advocacy grounded in feminist ethics of care.

In what follows, I unpack this by first outlining its epistemological foundations and then detailing its guiding principles, with comparison to culturally responsive evaluation to illustrate key distinctions.

5.6.2. Feminist Ethic of Care Epistemology

The Care Approach is guided by four key epistemological aspects from FEC: context and particularity, partiality, concreteness, and emotions as an epistemological complement to rationality.

5.6.2.1. *Context and Particularity*

Context and particularity recognise that programmes take place in particular contexts with regards to time, culture, history, economics, and so forth; they continuously develop through time and across webs of relationships and as such the application of universal principles in their evaluation disregards many of the aspects which make programmes unique (Keller & Kittay, 2017). An evaluation approach rooted in context and particularity allows and encourages evaluation teams to explore the complex social contexts programmes operate within. In so doing, evaluators can better understand the differing/relational roles of stakeholders which in turn could guide their approach in responding to (and potentially challenging) power asymmetries in ways appropriate to the setting rather than in a way that risks alienating some stakeholders. Context and particularity as an epistemological value mirror key principles of culturally responsive evaluation through the recognition of the importance of context and culture in developing community power structures. For example, Kushnier et al. (2023) and Chouinard and Cram (2020) describe how power and culture are significant parts of context and that by rejecting the concept of culture-free evaluation, culturally responsive evaluation centres context within the evaluation process.

5.6.2.2. *Partiality*

Partiality, the second value of FEC epistemology, encourages the evaluator to recognise that cultures and contexts are scenes of constant debate and that giving space to commonly 'silent voices' is important in challenging structural injustice (Brisolara & Seigart, 2012). This promotes the evaluator to take responsibility for developing methodologies which not only seek out marginalised voices but also allocate time and resources to develop trust. In doing so, epistemic justice—which views truth as deriving from the experiences and knowledge of all engaged in a particular set of social interactions, especially those who are marginalised (Fricker, 2007)—can be promoted.

This value is also reflected in the principles of culturally responsive evaluation, which promote epistemic justice and the importance of authentic relationships between evaluators and programme participants. However, the Care Approach differs subtly in its emphasis on advocacy: it differs subtly, however, through the space it gives for advocacy: where culturally responsive evaluation encourages recognition of power hierarchies and marginalised voices as silenced, the care approach expands on this by urging evaluators to actively seek out these voices and, where needed, being partial to them. For example, in cases where too many stakeholders inform the evaluation—risking overburden and dilution of stakeholder input, as argued by Tapella and Rodríguez-Bilella (2014)—the care approach gives evaluators a mandate to prioritise marginalised voices. This distinction is especially relevant given that Chouinard and Cram (2020) found wide variation across culturally responsive evaluations in how evaluators chose whom to include and exclude. By adopting partiality to marginalised voices, evaluators can develop a deeper understanding of systemic oppression—

particularly from those with direct experience—while minimising the risk of these insights being overridden by dominant perspectives.

Partiality also considers the voices of those whose absence from the programme may contribute to the perpetuation of marginalisation. For example, despite evidence that fathers' involvement in parenting programmes can have wide-ranging benefits—including helping to shift harmful gender norms—men are often under-engaged due to factors such as poverty, time-use patterns, and prevailing gender norms (Jeong et al., 2024). The Care Approach encourages evaluators to consider the disengaged voices of those who hold power, as their lack of involvement may further reinforce inequitable structures. In the case of parenting programmes, for instance, being partial to men's perspectives may reveal barriers to their participation and inform more inclusive design. Without this, evaluations risk further entrenching gendered caregiving roles by overlooking the reasons behind low male engagement.

Navigating the mandate for advocacy can be challenging; for instance, the views of marginalised participants may themselves reinforce gender hierarchies. To address such complexities, I draw on the concept of critical agency, which recognises that agency can both reproduce and challenge systemic inequalities. It refers to people's capacity to critically examine the roots of their marginalisation and act to challenge them (Drèze & Sen, 2002; Poveda & Roberts, 2018). Evaluators using the Care Approach—particularly in evaluations commissioned by Global North donors—must remain cognisant of potential cultural tensions between donors' expectations and beneficiaries' values. For example, while many Western feminists may view caring roles as restrictive, some non-Western perspectives value and appreciate these roles such that they are meaningful sources of both joy and burden (Bulbeck, 1998; Hoque, 2024; Narayan, 1989). By investigating—and where appropriate, cultivating—the critical

agency of marginalised participants while developing relationships, evaluators can balance their advocacy role with the Care Approach's broader goal of combatting oppressive gendered arrangements. This process could be supported with Freirean problem-posing questions ("but why is that?") to encourage deeper reflection and critical analysis of participants' own views (Poveda & Roberts, 2018). In doing so, evaluators remain responsive to lived experiences and aspirations while aligning with the approach's broader goals.

5.6.2.3. *Concreteness*

Concreteness, as an epistemological value of the Care Approach, refers to knowledge grounded in lived experience and the detailed realities of the 'everyday' (Hamington, 2018). Such knowledge is local and contextual, and shaped through trust, engagement, and dialogue with community members, including the marginalised (Benhabib, 1998; Hamington, 2018). It complements more generalised forms of knowledge, such as those derived from history, research, or professional experience, by anchoring evaluation in the lived realities of the community (Hamington, 2018). In practice, this means evaluators must spend time developing authentic relationships and being attuned to the everyday dynamics of those involved in or affected by the programme.

Culturally responsive evaluation similarly values lived experience as a source of insight into community contexts. For example, Frierson et al. (2010) emphasise how shared lived experience between evaluators and participants can support more democratic and accurate evaluation processes. Yet the Care Approach extends this emphasis by framing concrete knowledge not merely as a contextual resource but as a core epistemology—one that demands active inquiry into everyday life, including

domains often considered outside the scope of formal evaluation, such as care work in the private sphere. For example, van der Harst et al. (2023) found that care work in the private sphere often meant programmes focused on poverty alleviation or women's economic empowerment unintentionally overburdened women.

This highlights a key distinction: where CRE tends to focus on cultural relevance and representation, the Care Approach urges evaluators to interrogate how daily, often invisible practices (e.g. unpaid caring) shape programme engagement, outcomes, and unintended consequences. In this way, concrete knowledge not only informs the evaluation context but expands its boundaries—bringing into focus aspects of lived reality that might otherwise remain unexamined.

5.6.2.4. *Emotions complementing rationality*

The final epistemological value underpinning the Care Approach is the consideration of emotions as a complement to rationality. Emotions can reflect tacit knowledge—subtle, embodied ways of knowing that cannot always be verbalised but nonetheless shape how people interpret and respond to programmes (Polanyi, 1966). Disregarding emotions as a form of knowledge risks overlooking culturally grounded responses to lived experiences and closing off valuable avenues for inquiry. For instance, understanding how strongly someone believes in a programme's value may significantly influence their engagement, yet such emotional insights are often excluded when evaluations focus solely on rational or quantifiable measures (Hill Collins, 2014).

CRE similarly promotes openness to alternative epistemologies and acknowledges how dominant knowledge systems shape norms, meaning, and value (Chouinard & Cram, 2020). However, the Care Approach places a stronger

epistemological emphasis on emotions—not only as data to be captured but also as a mode of engagement for evaluators. Emotional presence and openness can strengthen rapport, deepen trust, and support the collection of richer, more contextually meaningful data (Liamputtong, 2007).

This engagement is arguably part of good evaluative practice and aligns with CRE's emphasis on authentic relationships. Yet by treating emotions as an epistemological foundation, the Care Approach prompts evaluators to remain acutely aware of the potential emotional impact of evaluation itself. This includes being sensitive to the risks of retraumatisation when gathering data on sensitive topics, such as gender-based violence (Campbell et al., 2014; Shankley et al., 2023). In such cases, emotional attunement is not ancillary—it is ethically essential.

5.6.3. Principles shaping the Care Approach

These four values of FEC form the epistemological foundation upon which the Care Approach is based, informing which aspects of the feminist and responsive evaluation approaches could/should be drawn together to achieve this hybrid approach's aims of challenging the oppressive gendered social arrangements present in patriarchal societies. The principles that emerged from this negotiation are as follows: considering caring relationships, collective acknowledgement and responsibility, community wellbeing, and ensuring care for evaluation practices. Altogether, these principles form the Care Approach and encourage evaluators to recognise the importance of context and history, and to seek to empower and better understand those from which they gather data.

5.6.3.1. *Consideration of caring relationships*

Drawing from responsive evaluation and FEC, the principle of caring relationships foregrounds the relational nature of society and opens space for evaluators to trace how programme impacts extend beyond individual participants. This relational view pushes evaluators to consider complex, indirect, and potentially unintended outcomes which may be missed by more individual-focused approaches. These impacts do not occur in isolation; care, as a social and material practice, often flows between people, spaces and institutions. For example, when mothers take on more paid work, caregiving responsibilities may shift to other family members such as older siblings or grandparents which redistribute both time and emotional labour in ways that can exacerbate existing inequalities, such as older daughters dropping out of school (Samman et al., 2016).

While CRE acknowledges relationality, the Care Approach's focus on caring relationships offers a more targeted entry point for complexity-responsive evaluation. As development interventions become more complex, understanding the relational pathways of impact—how benefits or burdens circulate through families, households, or social groups—becomes essential (Bamberger et al., 2017). Furthermore, caring relationships are not always positive. They can be supportive, oppressive, or both, and exploring this ambivalence offers evaluators richer insights into programme consequences.

A focus on caring relationships also brings into view outcomes rooted in the private sphere, such as unpaid care work. This is especially important for evaluations aiming to advance gender equity. The household is a key site where gendered power relations are enacted and reinforced, yet it often remains outside the scope of formal evaluations. While CRE encourages evaluators to consider programme boundaries,

this is typically framed at the level of the broader community. As a result, indirect or intra-household dynamics, such as how women business owners disproportionately allocate income toward children or domestic needs (Carranza et al., 2018), may go unnoticed. The Care Approach is uniquely equipped to capture such dynamics by treating the household as a critical evaluative space. For instance, Samman et al. (2016) show that in some cash transfer programmes targeted at women, increased financial agency can provoke tension with male partners, occasionally escalating to gender-based violence. A care-informed lens would prompt evaluators to explore how such tensions reflect entrenched norms around who provision, caregiving, and how programme benefits are negotiated within families.

5.6.3.2. *Collective acknowledgement and responsibility*

Collective acknowledgement and responsibility promotes a vision of society in which care functions as a ‘species activity’—a shared, collective practice in which responsibilities and obligations are distributed fairly, enabling all individuals to meet their own needs while contributing to the care of others (Boulton et al., 2015; Tronto, 2013a). Unlike the principle of caring relationships, which foregrounds interpersonal connections, this principle centres on how the distribution of caring labour shapes individuals’ capacity to participate in the public sphere. Evaluators are thus encouraged to interrogate how unequal care burdens, particularly those borne by women, constrain or shape engagement with development programmes.

For instance, the Care Approach prompts evaluators to ask whether programme demands may inadvertently place additional strain on women already stretched by caregiving responsibilities. If care burdens are not explicitly considered, interventions may reproduce gendered inequalities rather than alleviate them.

Alternatively, this principle may lead evaluators to examine how unequal care burdens exclude women from programme participation altogether.

While CRE also foregrounds social justice, it typically begins with the epistemologies and worldviews of marginalised groups. The Care Approach adds a structural lens: it pushes evaluators to examine how the interaction between private and public spheres systematically marginalises people, particularly women. For example, initiatives to improve women's employability that fail to consider household responsibilities may result in a 'double work day,' where women must juggle employment and caregiving, ultimately harming their wellbeing (Gadsby et al., 2024).

Recognising care as both a private burden and public good expands the evaluator's attention to unintended outcomes and offers a more holistic pathway towards gender justice. It positions care not as an individual concern, but as a collective responsibility—one that development programmes must take seriously if they are to promote meaningful equity.

5.6.3.3. *Community wellbeing*

Community wellbeing is a central principle of the Care Approach, particularly in relation to its social justice aims. Defined as “the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential” (Wiseman & Brasher, 2008), it shifts evaluative focus from programme-centric outcomes to community-defined needs and aspirations.

By promoting epistemic justice, this principle empowers communities—including routinely marginalised voices—to define what wellbeing means in their own terms. It encourages evaluators to rebalance power across stakeholder groups, not only within

the community but crucially between communities and funders. This might involve collaborative, deliberative processes where community interests are actively negotiated and embedded in evaluation criteria (House & Howe, 1999). In turn, this shapes core aspects of evaluation design such as sampling, data collection, and the interpretation of findings.

While CRE also values epistemic justice and the inclusion of multiple voices (Chouinard & Cram, 2020), the Care Approach places stronger emphasis on power redistribution—particularly between donors and beneficiaries—and how this shift can inform every stage of an evaluation.

This principle takes on added importance in evaluations of gender equity programmes in the Global South, where patriarchal norms often shape who participates and whose voices are heard. In such settings, methodological plurality, the use of diverse, culturally appropriate methods to capture a range of perspectives, is essential (Bamberger & Podems, 2002). For example, issues like domestic violence or control of household finances may be difficult to raise in group deliberation for defining community wellbeing, especially if doing so challenges gender norms and places women at risk (Weber et al., 2019).

The Care Approach encourages evaluators to recognise such risks and adapt accordingly by, for instance, offering confidential or gender-segregated methods of data collection. While CRE acknowledges these complexities, the Care Approach embeds them within an explicit concern for wellbeing and care, offering evaluators both a normative and practical guide to safeguarding participants and centring justice.

5.6.3.4. *Care for evaluation practice*

Care for evaluation practice is a foundational principle of the Care Approach, rooted in the belief that evaluators must remain responsive to the evolving needs of both the evaluation and the people involved in it. This principle comprises three interrelated dimensions: cultural competence, attention to wellbeing, and ethical responsiveness to competing stakeholder needs.

First, cultural competence involves more than knowing the local language. It requires a grounded, context-specific understanding of community histories, norms, and social dynamics—particularly in multilingual, multi-ethnic settings where power asymmetries are acute (Dighe & Sarode, 2019). Historically, Global North researchers working in the Global South have often treated colloquial language proficiency as a sufficient proxy for cultural understanding of the region and communities in which the programme is taking place (Dighe & Sarode, 2019). While the Care Approach builds on CRE and affirms the value of tools like cultural guides (Chouinard & Cram, 2020; Hood et al., 2015), it pushes evaluators to go further: to carefully situate themselves and their methods within the ethical and relational fabric of the context. In practice, this could mean working with local evaluators who are embedded in the community, holding pre-evaluation consultations to surface culturally specific norms, or adapting data collection tools through iterative co-design with participants.

Second, care for evaluation practice extends to the wellbeing of all involved. This includes designing evaluations that are sensitive to participant fatigue, cultural norms, and accessibility needs (Jeong et al., 2023). It also includes care for evaluators themselves through realistic timelines, emotional support, and reflexive practice, particularly when evaluations address sensitive issues such as gender-based violence and poverty. Practically, this might involve offering participants the option to skip

questions or pause interviews, checking for (and acting appropriately upon) signals of distress during data collection, and debriefing with team members after emotionally taxing sessions. While these practices may require additional time and resources, they are critical for ethically sound and emotionally sustainable evaluation. While CRE touches on such issues, the Care Approach makes them central: care is not only a method but an ethos shaping how evaluations are designed, conducted, and experienced.

Finally, this principle encourages evaluators to ethically negotiate the competing demands of funders and communities. Rather than positioning these actors as adversaries, the Care Approach envisions them in relational terms: funders enable programming that communities shape and experience, while the success and relevance of those programmes, in turn, justify the role of the funders. Evaluators play a critical role in mediating this relationship. For example, they can use culturally appropriate methodologies that are meaningful to participants while still generating data funders find actionable. While this may create ethical tensions for the evaluator, such as when funder reporting requirements clash with community priorities, the Care Approach encourages transparency and negotiation in these moments. Practically, this may include establishing advisory groups with both funders and participants, disseminating results in formats appropriate for different audiences, and running community feedback sessions to verify and contextualise findings before final reporting.

In all cases, care for evaluation practice centres on the humanity of all involved—evaluators, participants, and funders alike—and insists that process matters as much as outcome.

5.6.4. Revisiting the Value of the Care Approach

In sum, the Care Approach draws together insights from FEC, and feminist and responsive evaluation to offer a framework grounded in four key principles: consideration of caring relationships, collective acknowledgement and responsibility, community wellbeing, and care for evaluation practice. Underlying each of these principles are four epistemological values derived from FEC: context and particularity, partiality, concreteness, and emotions as a complement to rationality. Separately, these principles and epistemological values are not new to the practice of evaluation. In combination, however, they address four common limitations of dominant evaluative practice in the Global South:

- (1) Methodological bias toward experimental methods is addressed by prioritising context-sensitive, community-driven methods rooted in lived realities, as encouraged by the principles of care for evaluation practice and community wellbeing.
 - (2) Accountability bias toward donors is countered by shifting evaluators' orientation toward beneficiaries' definitions of value and by fostering open, responsive dialogue with communities and donors—embodying a commitment to epistemic justice.
 - (3) Neglect of complexity and unintended consequences is tackled through attention to relationality and the entanglement of the private and public spheres. The principles of caring relationships and collective acknowledgement and responsibility prompt evaluators to explore indirect, emergent, and intersectional outcomes.
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- (4) Lack of evaluative capacity is addressed by elevating the importance of cultural competence, emotional reflexivity, and care for evaluator wellbeing, encouraging capacity-building and ethically grounded engagement with complex contexts.

The Care Approach's grounding in feminist principles makes it particularly effective for interrogating and addressing gendered power structures in patriarchal contexts. It does so by emphasising epistemic justice, recognising how caregiving responsibilities are shared, and foregrounding the relational entanglement of private and public life. In doing so, it encourages evaluators to act not just as observers but as political advocates committed to equity.

Ultimately, the Care Approach positions evaluation as both a technical and ethical practice—one that can help determine a programme's effectiveness while also challenging structural inequalities. By centring the experiences, needs, and aspirations of intended beneficiaries, evaluations become not only more accurate and contextually relevant, but more just. This generates evidence for funders that is both actionable and accountable to communities, offering a path toward development practice that is genuinely equity-enhancing.

Table 1. How the care approach helps evaluators to address shortcomings of evaluation in the Global South

	Shortcoming of evaluation in Global South			
Aspect of Care approach	Bias towards experimental methods for impact evaluations	Accountability bias towards the donor	Neglect of complexity and unintended outcomes	Lack of evaluative capacity
Considering caring relationship			✓	

Caring for evaluation practice	✓	✓		✓
Collective acknowledgement and responsibility			✓	
Community wellbeing	✓	✓		

5.7. Conclusion

Evaluation plays a crucial role in development by generating evidence about what works – which, in turn, influences funding decisions and programme design. As such, evaluations do not merely measure outcomes; they shape which needs and priorities are legitimised. This gives evaluation substantial power, making it imperative that appropriate, context-sensitive approaches are used. Yet, evaluations in the Global South often fall short due to methodological bias, donor-centred accountability, limited attention to complex outcomes, and inadequate evaluative capacity (Dighe & Sarode, 2019). These pitfalls obstruct meaningful judgement of programme effectiveness. In patriarchal societies, where gendered power dynamics are deeply entrenched, poorly designed evaluations may even reinforce the inequalities they seek to redress. Evaluations of gender equity programmes, in particular, carry an ethical obligation to account for such dynamics.

The Care Approach introduced in this paper directly addresses these shortcomings by drawing on FEC and integrating principles from feminist and responsive evaluation. It encourages methodological plurality, responsiveness to local contexts, attention to unintended and relational outcomes, and cultural competence within evaluation teams. Crucially, it does so while maintaining a focus on the direct and indirect consequences of gender inequity. Positioned to confront the oppressive gendered arrangements embedded in many development settings, the Care Approach offers both a practical and ethical reorientation of evaluation practice. Through

comparison with CRE, the paper has highlighted what makes the Care Approach distinct—especially its grounding in care as a relational, political, and justice-oriented practice. Its principles push evaluators to engage deeply with community histories, advocate for marginalised needs, treat gender as relational, and recognise care as both a dynamic and diagnostic evaluative lens.

Like all approaches, the Care Approach has limitations. First, its emphasis on contextual and concrete knowledge requires evaluators to invest significant time in building relationships and developing deep cultural understanding, making it resource-intensive. Second, shifting evaluative accountability toward beneficiaries may create tensions with donor organisations, especially if beneficiary priorities diverge from donor goals. Third, advocating for gender equity in patriarchal contexts may risk resistance or be perceived as paternalistic. Evaluators must navigate these tensions with sensitivity, balancing advocacy with a deep respect for local values and the agency of marginalised participants.

Future work could involve piloting an evaluation framework either adapted from existing models or newly developed using the Care Approach. Such practical implementation would allow further exploration of its feasibility, challenges, and value in real-world settings. Given its ethical grounding in advocacy and social justice, future research could also explore how the Care Approach might be extended beyond gender and the Global South to address intersecting forms of structural inequality. In doing so, it may contribute meaningfully to Sustainable Development Goal 10: reducing inequality within and among countries (UN, 2015).

6. Concluding discussion

In this chapter, I draw on the findings and respect the limitations of the research to present the argument that the current ICT4D paradigm, ranging from the policy process to evaluation of programmes, is poorly suited to capturing the gendered outcomes of ICT4D. I recommend the adoption of a care-focused approach that embraces complexity, is gender-responsive, and emphasises equity. Following this discussion, I will highlight my empirical, methodological, and conceptual academic contributions, before finishing the thesis by outlining directions for future research relevant to the broader thesis.

6.1. Summary and synthesis of findings

Through the literature review chapter and methodology appendix, I framed not only the key gaps in the literature I intended to address but also how I intended to do so. In this section, I will discuss how I addressed each of the research questions of this thesis and synthesise these findings to answer the overarching research question, *“How can care be used as a theoretical lens to deepen our understanding of the gendered impacts of ICT4D?”* I will concurrently discuss the limitations of the research to provide relevant context to the findings.

6.1.1. ICT4D Policy: Failing to Address Sociocultural Barriers and the Promise of Care-Informed Alternatives

My intersectional feminist critical policy analysis (**Chapter 3**) concluded that the sociocultural factors contributing to the digital gender divide are inadequately addressed within Ethiopia’s ICT4D policies. Supplemented by key informant interviews, my analysis of four national-level Ethiopian policies—spanning development, education, and digital transformation—found little attempt to address the

deeper structural causes of the digital gender divide, despite regular acknowledgements of gender across the policies. While sex-disaggregated data and gender equality targets were often included, gendered power dynamics—such as women’s disproportionate caregiving responsibilities and underrepresentation in digital content development—remained unchallenged. Consequently, the policies underpinning ICT4D are poorly positioned to drive substantive gender-focused change.

The scarcity of online, publicly available, English-language policies limited the analysis to four national-level Ethiopian policies, which I expect led my findings to overestimate recognition of gender in ICT4D policies despite their inadequate gendered consideration. Key informant interviews described the governmental push for gender equality as externally driven, suggesting that policies not publicly available in English are likely to have fewer gendered considerations as they are less likely to be scrutinised by international organisations, particularly those who provide aid for Ethiopia. Future research could expand this analysis by incorporating sub-national policies, non-English documents, or internal draft policies to further contextualise these findings.

These policies not only reflect but risk reproducing the patriarchal structures within which they are embedded. The Ethiopian government’s integrationist approach to gender equality fails to challenge the foundational power structures shaping policy design and implementation. This finding aligns with critiques by Holdo (2015) and Dessie (2021), as well as insights from international consultants involved in the development of Digital Ethiopia 2025 (Anonymous, 2022), who described women’s inclusion in policy processes are largely symbolic. For instance, while policies aim to enhance women’s ability to use ICTs, they often overlook other dimensions of access,

including affordability (restricted access to loans due to gendered property norms), availability (limited access to safe public ICT spaces), and appetite (fear of online harassment).

This limited attention to structural barriers reflects a broader failure within the global ICT4D paradigm to meaningfully capture and respond to marginalised voices—specifically, in this analysis, those of women—within policy processes. It demonstrates a lack of genuine participation from marginalised groups in the formulation and implementation of ICT4D policies, resulting in policies that are ill-equipped to foster equitable ICT4D outcomes. Such policies are symptomatic of an approach which foregrounds problems of exclusion, such as lack of access, but fails to consider the costs of inclusion (Ganapathy et al., 2024), including the potential harms of technology or exploitative participation, and in which broader power structures, like patriarchal social norms and Global North influence, are left largely unquestioned (Vannini et al., 2024).

However, caring principles, as outlined in **Chapter 5**, could inform the ICT4D policy process in Ethiopia, offering an alternative approach that is gender-responsive, equity-focused, and attuned to complexity. Principles such as epistemic justice, power redistribution, partiality and advocacy for marginalised voices, recognition of relationality, and acknowledgement of gendered caring roles as structural barriers could reorient policy processes toward addressing the digital gender divide. For example, genuine participation of women in policy formulation could foreground the impact of care work on digital access. Care intersects with all aspects of digital inclusion: it affects affordability by limiting income opportunities; availability by imposing household priorities; ability by restricting time for education and training; and,

indirectly, appetite by hindering women's participation in digital leadership and content creation.

By embedding caring principles into policy processes, ICT4D policies could better address the structural barriers that perpetuate the digital gender divide and contribute to more equitable digital futures. This would not be without its own challenges, however, as embedding caring principles into policy processes requires time, money and capacity and willingness to undertake. For example, incorporating epistemic justice could involve collaborative, deliberative processes where community interests are actively negotiated or becoming better attuned to the everyday lived experiences of marginalised groups through well-established relationships; each of these take significant resources which governments may lack.

Having established that current ICT4D policies are ill-equipped to address the structural and gendered barriers that sustain the digital gender divide, and that caring principles could offer an alternative pathway, it is important to turn to how ICTs themselves interact with care within development processes. This enables us to understand not only the limitations of policy but also the relational dynamics through which ICTs shape development outcomes in everyday contexts.

6.1.2. Care is a fundamental ICT4D pathway, and we cannot fully understand the impacts of ICT4D without recognising it

My empirical research in Ethiopia (**Chapter 4**) identified care as a fundamental pathway through which ICT4D occurred. A two-stage qualitative study was conducted to understand how care impacted respondents' outcomes in ICT4D: findings from 12 interviews—six with men and six with women—in the first stage were used to

conceptualise care in the Ethiopian context and to help select the research population for the second stage, and the second stage collected information from 25 informal women workers on how ICTs impacted their engagement with care and consequent realisation of valued functionings.

Using an inductive thematic analysis method, I found that ICTs acted as both generative inputs and transformative conversion factors (notably transforming other people as inputs) in affecting how people realised functionings through care. In doing so, ICTs contributed to respondents realising valued functionings such as providing care, communing, being nourished, and knowing the wellbeing of loved ones. These findings not only indicate that care plays an important role in the ICT4D process, but that failing to consider these simplifies our understanding of the complex social phenomenon that ICT4D is.

Two key implications were gathered from these findings. Firstly, that there exists a nuanced relationship between care, ICTs and development, which suggests that they are an important set of outcomes to consider in the ICT4D process. Such outcomes become particularly notable in contexts where interdependency and care are central to people's worldview, as supported by the research of Zamani et al. (2020) who found that ICTs were used as part of the sharing and collectivist values which underpin the uMunthu philosophy in Malawi. Secondly, to capture the holistic and complex impacts of ICT4D, caring impacts—and the relational practices it exemplifies—need to be considered. Care is not just an additional set of outcomes which can be considered, but a fundamental ICT4D pathway which arises from contextual values and philosophies.

Given the gendered nature of care, we can infer that the role of care as an ICT4D pathway is not gender neutral but is shaped by gendered power structures that confine women to unpaid and undervalued care roles, constraining their participation in ICT-enabled opportunities. The current development paradigm rarely considers care-based outcomes, like caring for others and communing, unless explicitly targeted. By failing to consider these impacts, we can infer that a) an important gendered ICT4D pathway is left uncaptured, b) the dominant development paradigm privileges men's experiences and measures of impact relevant to them, while leaving relational and collective outcomes invisible.

This omission perpetuates gendered power structures within ICT4D and exposes the limitations of dominant development evaluation paradigms, which emphasise decision-oriented, results-based approaches rooted in Global North epistemologies that prioritise autonomy and financial efficiency over relational wellbeing and complexity (FCDO, 2023; UNEG, 2016; USAID, 2020). As Bamberger et al. (2017) highlights, there is an urgent need for evaluation approaches that are complexity-responsive, equity-focused, and attuned to gender.

An evaluation paradigm rooted in the feminist ethic of care offers a potential shift to meet this need. Grounded in interdependence and relational ethics, care-informed evaluations are well suited to capturing the complex, gendered impacts of ICT4D. As care is a heavily gendered practice, using it as an evaluative lens inherently supports gender responsiveness. Moreover, recognising the entanglement of the private and public spheres highlights how inequalities in the distribution of care labour underpin broader social inequities, underscoring care's potential to illuminate pathways toward equity and social justice in ICT4D.

Two specific limitations provide context for these findings. Firstly, by restricting interviews to 25 informal women workers in Addis Ababa, the empirics are contextually specific to broader Ethiopian culture (which itself disregards nuances across ethnicities), gender and employment dynamics, limiting the generalisability of how ICTs impact care as an ICT4D pathway. However, this does not limit the broader contribution that care *can* act as a critical ICT4D pathway. Second, there is ambiguity around why care is a valued functioning: whether participants value it intrinsically or due to societal expectations. This limits clarity regarding agency and the precise nature of development outcomes achieved through ICTs. Future research could expand these findings by examining care as an ICT4D pathway across diverse cultural contexts and by investigating how care is valued to better understand agency within gendered power structures.

In short, I have shown that care can play an important role in ICT4D and used this insight to challenge the dominant development evaluation paradigm. This underpins my subsequent proposal for an evaluative framework rooted in care that is complexity-responsive, equity-focused, and gender responsive.

Building on these insights, the next section outlines how the Care Approach can operationalise these principles to reorient evaluation practices within ICT4D.

6.1.3. The Care Approach is uniquely positioned to capture the gendered impacts of ICT4D

Drawing on the findings of **Chapter 4**, I developed the Care Approach, an evaluative approach that integrates the feminist ethic of care with feminist and responsive evaluation. This approach is positioned to address some of the shortcomings of the dominant development evaluation paradigm which arise from a

focus on useful results, impartiality and objectivity, and assumptions of linear causality—focuses which are ill-suited to the Global South where contexts are more unpredictable and vulnerabilities are magnified (Dighe & Sarode, 2019; Ofir, 2013).

The shortcomings include:

- An overreliance on experimental methods for impact evaluations.
- Accountability bias towards donors rather than communities.
- Insufficient attention to complexity and unintended outcomes. And
- A lack of evaluative capacity.

The approach uses four epistemological principles from FEC to bring together feminist and responsive approaches. These are:

1. **Context and particularity**: encourages evaluation grounded in complex social contexts and power relations, and contextually appropriate responses to these relations.
 2. **Partiality** to marginalised voices: demands attention to, and even advocates for, silenced perspectives, and recognises that those absent from the programme can reinforce marginalisation. Also reflects upon how silenced voices can reinforce their own marginalisation by considering critical agency.
 3. **Concreteness** as lived, embodied knowledge: recognises lived experience and relationships as valid and necessary sources of knowledge.
 4. **Emotions** as a complement to rationality: values emotional insight and presence in producing meaningful, situated knowledge.
-

These principles underpin four core tenets of the Care Approach, each designed to address the systemic limitations of conventional evaluation practices:

1. **Consideration of caring relationships:** centres relationality as a window to complex outcomes and highlights the importance of the household as an evaluative space.
2. **Collective acknowledgement and responsibility:** foregrounds care as a shared social activity that structures participation in public life.
3. **Community wellbeing:** promotes epistemic justice by enabling communities to define wellbeing on their own terms and seeks a collaborative, deliberative process to actively negotiate and embed these interests in evaluative criteria.
4. **Care for evaluation practice:** encourages culturally competent, ethically reflexive, and emotionally attuned evaluators who care for both participants and themselves.

These values are not wholly new to evaluation practice, but their integration in the Care Approach offers a coherent response to the systemic flaws of the dominant paradigm in the Global South. Table 12 summarises how the Care Approach directly addresses these flaws.

Table 12. How the Care Approach addresses shortcomings to the dominant development evaluation paradigm

Shortcoming of dominant evaluation practice in the Global South	How the Care Approach addresses this
Overreliance on experimental methods	Emphasises context-sensitive, participatory methods rooted in lived experiences.
Donor-focused accountability	Reorients toward epistemic justice and community-defined value.
Neglect of complexity	Embraces relationality and the entanglement of private and public spheres.
Lack of evaluative capacity	Prioritises cultural competence, emotional reflexivity, and care for evaluators' wellbeing.

My inability to implement this approach due to time and resource constraints is an important limitation for this finding, as it remains purely theoretical. This limits the extent to which the feasibility and real-world utility of the approach can be assessed. Evaluation is an inherently practical field, and challenging the dominant paradigm ideally requires empirical demonstration. Nonetheless, this thesis lays the theoretical groundwork for such future applications. Future research should empirically test the Care Approach in ICT4D evaluations to assess its feasibility, contextual adaptability, and impact on promoting gender equity and relational wellbeing.

In summary, the Care Approach offers a theoretically grounded, equity-focused alternative to conventional evaluation approaches which responds to calls for evaluation models that are equity-focused, gender-responsive, and attuned to complexity (Bamberger et al., 2017). By centring relationality and epistemic justice, it challenges gendered power structures embedded in ICT4D evaluation, positioning care as a lens to capture the complex, gendered, and relational impacts of ICT4D in the Global South. In doing so, it offers a practical pathway for reorienting ICT4D evaluation towards gender equity, relational wellbeing, and social justice.

6.1.4. Care is an important lens for understanding the gendered impacts of ICT4D

These findings can be synthesised to answer the overarching research question, *'How can care be developed as a theoretical lens to understand and evaluate the gendered impacts of ICT4D?'* and show that care is a critical lens for deepening our understanding of gendered ICT4D outcomes. I have shown that Ethiopian ICT4D policies fail to consider gendered power structures, including caring roles, and thus are unlikely to challenge the digital gender divide. In doing so, I

suggested embedding caring principles into policy processes to better address the structural barriers that underpin the digital gender divide. Building on this empirically, I highlighted care as an important pathway in ICT4D. In doing so, I demonstrated that the dominant development paradigm often fails to consider this pathway and, owing to the gendered nature of care, privileges men's experiences and measures of impact relevant to them. Lastly, I developed the Care Approach to address the shortcomings of the dominant development evaluation paradigm by drawing on feminist ethic of care principles as well as feminist and responsive evaluation insights.

Synthesising these insights, care emerges as a vital lens for understanding and transforming the gendered impacts of ICT4D, addressing both relational and structural dimensions of inequality. By centring care—and the relationality, epistemic justice, and attention to complexity it entails—development processes can engage more meaningfully with a deeply gendered practice that challenges power structures, shifts what is valued in development outcomes, and fosters more equitable and meaningful ICT4D futures.

This synthesis not only answers the overarching research question but also underscores the need for further scholarship and practice that position care as foundational in ICT4D policy, implementation, evaluation, and in shaping the broader development agenda.

While these findings provide a clear answer to the overarching research question, they are bounded by contextual and methodological limitations, including the Ethiopian focus and the inability to implement the Care Approach, which are further discussed in Section 1.3. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the scope and transferability of these findings.

6.2. Academic contributions

In this section I will outline the academic contributions of this thesis which fall into three categories: empirical, methodological, and conceptual.

6.2.1. Empirical

By working with informal women workers in Ethiopia—a group rarely studied in ICT4D and care research—I have contributed to the research on how technology impacts their engagement with care. On one hand, care research in the Global South is often focused on unpaid carers in the household, migrant carers, or domestic workers, while on the other, the impacts of ICTs on care are primarily studied in the Global North. This work simultaneously shifts the focus on care research to informal women workers—a space of labour precarity and low-technology ICT use—and examines how ICTs impact care in a markedly different context, one in which care and relationality are central.

I also empirically explored care as a pathway within ICT4D through a two-stage qualitative study with informal women workers in Ethiopia in **Chapter 4**. By investigating how ICTs informed their engagement with care and, in turn, their attainment of valued functionings, I demonstrated an empirical relationship between ICTs, care, and development which had previously been unexplored. In doing so, I not only identified care's role as an important pathway in ICT4D, operating as both a generative input and transformative conversion factor, but I also provided evidence that failing to consider care pathways within ICT4D processes and evaluations marginalises women's relational and care-based experiences.

6.2.2. Methodological

My primary methodological contribution was through the development of the Care Approach in **Chapter 5**. I proposed a unique evaluative approach grounded in the feminist ethic of care and informed by feminist and responsive evaluation principles. This offered a complexity- and gender-responsive, and equity-focused alternative to conventional evaluation approaches which addressed the following issues of the dominant development evaluation paradigm:

- an overreliance on experimental methods for impact evaluations,
- donor-focused accountability,
- neglect of complexity, and
- a lack of evaluative capacity in the Global South.

I operationalised care within evaluation in a way different from responsive evaluation. While responsive evaluation was developed from caring principles, I articulated four epistemological principles arising from the feminist ethic of care— context and particularity, partiality to marginalised voices, concreteness as lived knowledge, and emotions as a complement to rationality. In doing so, I translated these into four actionable principles for practitioners: consideration of caring relationships, collective acknowledgement and responsibility, community wellbeing, and care for evaluation practice.

6.2.3. Conceptual

My most significant conceptual contribution was positioning care as a theoretical lens for ICT4D. I showed that care is not a secondary concern, rather it is a fundamental analytical and practical lens for understanding ICT4D impacts. I showed that centring care can:

- challenge gendered power structures,
- shift what is valued as an ICT4D outcome,
- promote equity through relationality and epistemic justice, and
- reveal complexity within development contexts.

I contributed initially to the ICT4D literature through the intersectional feminist critical policy analysis of Ethiopia's national ICT4D strategy in **Chapter 3**. This advances the field by moving beyond surface-level analyses of gender such as sex-disaggregated data to examine structural barriers shaping the digital gender divide, like gendered caring roles and power structures. Furthermore, I showed that the integrationist approach used in the policy process failed to address the gendered power structures which underpin the digital divide, despite input from Global North actors in shaping the policies. I suggested the use of caring principles, such as epistemic justice and recognition of relationality, as an alternative pathway for informing the ICT4D policy approach to address these shortcomings.

I also extended the feminist ethic of care into ICT4D evaluation—and arguably evaluation practice more generally. In doing so, I positioned care as a means of operationalising gender equity and complexity within evaluation by recognising relational practices and the entanglement of the private and public spheres. This provides a pathway for embedding care-informed principles within policy design, ICT programme implementation, and development evaluation.

Finally, I used care ethics as a means of bridging Global North and South discourses, providing a relational lens developed in the Global North which can critically engage with Global North paradigms while also mirroring the relational philosophies common in the Global South.

Together, these contribution position care as a transformative analytical, empirical, and methodological lens for rethinking gender equity and complexity within ICT4D research and practice.

6.3. Future research directions

This thesis opens several promising directions for future research.

First, future research should operationalise and test the Care Approach in real-world evaluation contexts. Comparative studies—evaluating the same programme using both conventional approaches and the Care Approach—would help assess the strengths, limitations, and feasibility of the Care Approach. This would allow for refinement of the approach and the development of practical guidance for its use by evaluators and development agencies. This is the highest priority future research direction, as it would practically validate the research throughout the thesis or indicate areas for refinement. Such validation is crucial for this research to have impact because extensive evidence will be needed to challenge the dominant development paradigm.

The second priority for future research is to deepen the theorisation of care in development studies, particularly in relation to concepts such as empowerment, justice, sustainability, and wellbeing. Extending the feminist ethic of care into adjacent areas—such as digital labour, digital platforms, and climate-resilient technologies—could grant further insights into the entanglements between care, inequality, and ICT4D. It could also further bridge Global North and South discourses in development, where the feminist ethic of care could prove to be a powerful tool in decolonising development.

There are additional future research directions which I would argue are less pressing, although still important. The first is to expand empirical understanding of care in ICT4D across different cultural, political, and technological contexts. Care is a culturally situated and deeply personal practice. Exploring how it is conceptualised and enacted in diverse settings—through cross-country or comparative studies—would offer insights into its variability and universality as a pathway in ICT4D.

The second is to explore how barriers to women's ICT engagement—such as affordability, availability, ability, and appetite—interact with each other. A systems analysis could help identify key leverage points within these interlocking barriers, offering practical insights for programme design and policy reform.

In summary, this thesis makes an original contribution by positioning care not only as an analytical tool but as a basis for rethinking ICT4D evaluation, policy, and theory from an equity-focused and relational perspective. It invites future work that not only critiques dominant paradigms but builds new ones—grounded in relationality, equity, and justice.

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Appendix A – Methodology

In this section, I describe my methodology, beginning with discussions of my epistemological and ontological stances, along with my positionality, before then moving to reflect upon using Ethiopia as my case study and the research methods for each paper; the latter section has significant overlap with the methodology subsections of chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the thesis. Lastly, I consider the ethical aspects of my research and offer a key reflection of my methodological choices.

Please note, that this section has been included for your background and is not required for an MLitt thesis. As such, it is largely unedited and does not include references, reflecting its progress at the point I was transferred to the MLitt.

1. Prologue

Throughout my DPhil, Ethiopia experienced an extended period of instability, firstly through the Covid pandemic and then because of political instability due to the Tigray War, which significantly impacted how I designed my research and fieldwork. The Covid pandemic meant that international travel was impossible and thus I could not travel to Ethiopia for fieldwork during 2020, for my second stint of MPhil fieldwork, and the first half of 2021. Due to cancelling my MPhil fieldwork, which my DPhil was intended to be a progression of, I had to completely shift my MPhil topic which led to a complete change in my DPhil topic.

From January 2021 to November 2021, I worked on a new DPhil topic which placed a significant emphasis on fieldwork which aimed to have the views of garment

workers in Ethiopian industrial parks guide the research. My planned trip in November 2021 coincided, however, with the escalation of the Tigray War in which the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) fought the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments. While the war was primarily contained to the Tigray region in Ethiopia's north before this time, it escalated in November 2021 as the TPLF captured more federal territory on the way towards Addis Ababa. This led the Ethiopian government to announce a nation-wide six-month state of emergency which not only meant that I had to cancel my fieldwork plans because travel to Ethiopia was not possible until at least April 2022, but that it was also uncertain when travel to Ethiopia would become feasible.

This escalation, as well as the resultant uncertainty of Ethiopia's political stability for the foreseeable future, led me to change and redesign my research yet again in April 2022. My final redesign of the DPhil project reduced the reliance on fieldwork while also ensuring that fieldwork could take place. This was important because the reduced timeline I had to complete my DPhil following these redesigns—restarting my DPhil with a new topic 2.5 years into my scheduled DPhil timeline—meant I needed to minimise the potential disruptions fieldwork in an unstable country could present.

These changes also prompted an important question for me to consider: 'why not change the country my fieldwork is taking place in?' I chose to continue situating my work in Ethiopia despite the instability for numerous reasons. Firstly, as a white man from the Global North conducting research in the Global South, I am incredibly fortunate and privileged to be conducting research in Ethiopia. I felt it was problematic and unethical to change country simply because the instability was causing (admittedly significant) issues with my DPhil, particularly when I could redesign my project. Secondly, I had developed a relationship with and understanding of Ethiopia through

my MPhil and throughout the development of my DPhil. Although I am sure I could have developed a similar understanding and relationship with another context if given appropriate time, I felt that, in the spirit of the feminist ethics of care which underlie my DPhil, I had a responsibility to be responsive to the changes in conditions in Ethiopia and recognise the importance of this established relationship rather than change contexts based on unemotional impartiality. Finally, Ethiopia is a very strong case study for this research. While it is not irreplaceable, the country's position as a local leader in digital development as well as the fortuitous timing of it accelerating its digital development in the same period of my DPhil, meant that a strong case would need to be made to change contexts. I felt that the Ethiopia's political instability was not a strong enough reason to change contexts.

2. Epistemology and ontology

I use a relational ontology and feminist epistemology for this thesis. A relational ontology places social and personal relationships at the forefront of existence rather than seeing people as primarily autonomous and atomistic being where relationships with other individuals occur through social contract (Robinson, 2006). The central tenet of feminist epistemology, situated knowledge, is that knowledge reflects the perspective of the knower (Anderson, 2024). Consequently, the same object can be understood in diverse ways according to the specific relations people have with it. This is reflected through eight key principles (Anderson, 2024):

1. Embodiment: people's bodies are different and are located differently in space and time which impacts how they experience the world.
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2. First-person vs third-person knowledge: individuals have first-person knowledge of themselves and experience of their own mental and bodily states, which differs from third-person knowledge.
3. Emotions, attitudes, interests, and values: People often use their emotions, attitudes, interests, and values as a filter through which they represent objects. For example, a gun owner could represent a gun as a source of security while a person who does not could view them as a threat.
4. Personal knowledge of others: What people know of each other depends on their personal relationships because people behave towards others and interpret the behaviour of others differently according to their personal relationship.
5. Know-how: Differences in people's skills may be a source of different propositional knowledge.
6. Cognitive styles: People have different styles of investigation and representation.
7. Background belief and worldview: Different background beliefs may lead to different beliefs about an object.
8. Relations to other inquirers: People may hold different epistemic roles which affect their epistemic relations with others and thus their access to information and their ability to convey their beliefs to others.

These ontological and epistemological positions have been operationalised in my research by impacting the theoretical framework which informs the research design, methods and methodology. For example, the thesis is centred around interdependent caring relationships which are grounded in a relational understanding of the world, while the views of marginalised groups have been identified and sought

during fieldwork with a recognition that within these groups there are different dimensions of marginalisation which impact their experiences and understanding of the world. These perspectives have also impacted my perspective as a researcher, influencing how I view myself in relation to the data that is collected, such as during data analysis, and how I reflect on the development of my theoretical work.

These positions also presented an interesting tension for the research given their emphasis on situated knowledge, which emphasises the uniqueness of context, and the use of a case study underpinning the research, from which I hoped to develop generalisable findings. How am I to generalise the issue of ICT4D and its relation to care and gender when it has such contextual underpinnings? To answer this question, I turned to the concept of generalised knowledge, that care requires not just a concrete knowledge of the person being cared for, but also broader general knowledge and skills which form the background of this care. Applying this to the concept of a case study helped confirm my decision that using a case study was an appropriate research approach. The general findings of this work in Ethiopia, while not directly transferable to other countries, provide the opportunity to generate broader learnings for other countries pursuing ICT4D, especially given the prevalence of policy transfer, which suggests that ICT4D policies will be broadly similar across, for example, the Horn of Africa.

3. Positionality

Positionality refers to a researcher's background, identity, and worldview that can impact their research in several ways, including the questions they ask, how they

analyse data, and the power dynamics between the researcher and research participants, as well as between the researcher and other researchers.

I am a straight white man educated to a master's degree level and who has been between 26-30 throughout the research. My perceptions of gender and gender roles as a researcher have been driven by my Western upbringing which may not align with the views of gender in various Ethiopian cultures. Opposing dominant Western perceptions though, I view people as ontologically relational beings and believe knowledge is socially, culturally, and temporally dependent.

Through an awareness of my positionality and privileges throughout my research, I approached interviewees and local researchers with humility, curiosity and care, recognising how their first-person knowledge related to my third-person knowledge. For example, when designing the interview guides with local researchers during fieldwork, we discussed not only how to translate the guide, but also how concepts such as care translated or could be conceptualised in the Ethiopian culture. In my desk-based work, this affected how I considered gender relations in Ethiopia and how I expected policy to address them; for example, despite conducting a feminist policy analysis which prioritised gendered considerations in policy, I recognised that government officials have a host of other priorities such as economic development, quelling ethnic tensions or political instability which may render gender a 'tick-box' exercise in policy. By being mindful of my positionality throughout my research, I was able to conduct and lead research more sensitive to the context and which was respectful to the research participants.

4. Case study

This research used an exploratory case study to explore how gender is considered in ICT4D and how the feminist ethic of care can be used to promote gender equity in this process. It was chosen because there has been no investigation into how the feminist ethic of care can inform the ICT4D process and, further, how this can in turn impact gender equity. Therefore, an investigation into a particular context can further understandings of this process and identify important next stages of research in this area.

Ethiopia was chosen as the location of the case study because digital technologies are at the heart of its government's development plans; it is leading the Horn of Africa in ICT4D and is currently liberalising its telecommunications sector to accelerate this process. Importantly, its development policies have been strongly influenced by expectations to pursue gender equality through, for example, their membership in the African Union and the UN-backed sustainable development goals. Therefore, Ethiopia is a useful case study to answer each research question through its emphasis on digital development and gender and could also be representative of the future of digital development in the region. It also has the potential to challenge current notions of digital development which place little emphasis on the role of care and relational impacts and thus fail to holistically consider the gendered impacts of digital development.

To perform this case study, I conducted a policy analysis of Ethiopia's digital development policies and undertook fieldwork interviewing informal women workers in Addis Ababa investigating the impact of ICTs on their engagement with care. I then theoretically developed a novel approach to evaluation which drew from the Feminist Ethic of Care as a proposed means for addressing the findings of this case study. Each of these methods are elaborated upon in the 'Research Methods' section.

4.3. Context

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa with approximately 110 million people, 85% of which live in rural areas. The country is incredibly ethnically and religiously diverse, consisting of over 85 ethnic groups (Webb et al., 1994) and most major world religions as well as animist beliefs. The country is split into nine ethno-linguistic national regional states and two administrative councils, each of which have the constitutional right to self-determination and secession; this Constitutional right has contributed to numerous localised wars, such as between Tigray and the national government.

The country has experienced a turbulent political history which continues to this day, and which has shaped its approach to development. From 1974-1991, the Derg regime, a communist government which overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie, led the country to widespread famine, economic collapse, and a reliance on foreign aid (Crummey et al., 2022). The transfer of power from the Derg regime to the Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) between 1991 and 1993 brought with it a market economy opened to the world (Gebrehiwot, 2019; Woldesenbet, 2020) as a means of pursuing strong economic growth to remove itself from among the least developed countries in the world (Alem et al. 2014). This government successfully promoted economic development through the industrial and agricultural sectors which partially fulfilled the millennium development goals (MDGs) while also seeing a rise in female entrepreneurship (Korzenevica et al. 2022). The current Abiy Ahmed government, which has been in power since 2018, has built upon this direction by promoting the female-dominated manufacturing industry (Abebe et al. 2020). It has

also placed significant emphasis on digital technologies and digital development following the digital development blueprint used by China.

4.4. Study site

Addis Ababa is the capital city of Ethiopia as well as its political and economic hub. Consequently, many policies are developed in and for Addis Ababa which has led the city to develop more quickly than other cities within the country and become a key destination for rural-urban migration. This high level of internal migration has led to an increase in the prevalence of informal work as the formal economy is unable to absorb migrants quickly enough.

The study site for the exploratory research was the area around Meskel Square, a local landmark home to a variety of people as a local transport hub. The area was an appropriate place to conduct this exploratory research as the goal of these interviews was to develop a conceptualisation of care, as well as an initial understanding of how ICTs could impact care, from a range of people. Including different ethnicities, ages, number of children, marital status etc.

The study site for the semi-structured interviews with informally working women was Megenagna Square in Addis Ababa. Megenagna Square is located at the centre of Addis Ababa and is a travel hub from which different routes lead to various parts of the city. As such, in addition to being a melting pot of ethnicities, it is the most population-dense location in Ethiopia during peak travel times, which makes it an ideal place for both formal and informal businesses to be. Bedru (2022) conducted a survey of the informal businesses in the area and found that approximately 32% of informal traders were women, that the most common age group for informal workers was 19-

29 (48%) but that 24% of informal traders were 18 or younger, and that 61% of informal workers had not received a secondary education. Notably, Megegnagna Square is the site of a power struggle between informal workers and the government. Police often snatch the products of informal workers, and the government has shut down any established locations of informal businesses in the area.

5. Research methods

5.3. Critical feminist policy analysis (Chapter 3)

A critical policy analysis (CPA) was conducted because it was developed as an analysis methodology to critique policy and advance equity and justice. Rata (2014) outlines its three stages as:

1. Conceptualising and theorising the policy context under study;
2. Analysing the policies themselves; and
3. Undertaking empirical research using case studies, narratives, ethnographies, and vignettes to understand how policy operates in people's lives.

Prior to conducting the analysis, it was important to select the policies relevant for the analysis. My first consideration was whether to include regional policies, which drove the implementation of federal policies in their region, or to focus solely on federal policies. Due to the centralisation of power in Ethiopia since 1995 (Yimenu, 2021), I chose only to analyse federal policies because they strongly informed the social and economic development policies of regional governments. My second decision regarded which policies to select given the scarcity of online, publicly available policies which had been translated to English. I decided to analyse the following policies

because they gave an appropriate overview of the consideration of gender in Ethiopian government's digital strategy:

- Ten Years Development Plan: the government's long-term development policy for 2021-2030;
- Digital Ethiopia 2025: the digital development strategy for Ethiopia, which includes a focus on inclusivity;
- Ethiopian Education Roadmap 2018-2030: the long-term education strategy which guided the Education Sector Development Programme policies; and
- Education Sector Development Programme VI: the policy guiding Ethiopia's education strategy.

The first stage of the CPA involved developing the broad historical, cultural, economic, and political contexts within which the policies were developed, as well as analysing the policies which preceded each of those selected for the CPA. Throughout this process, I remained cognisant of the role of the Global North in Ethiopia's history and recent development, particularly given Ethiopia's reliance on foreign aid with political conditionality (conditions to be met for aid to be provided).

The second stage of the CPA began by determining topics and questions to guide the analysis. Given the focus on gender, I chose to adapt the intersectional feminist policy analysis framework proposed by Kanenberg et al. (2019). This framework proposed 50 questions across 12 topics, which I refined through an iterative process to 17 questions across 9 topics based on their relevance to the paper's research questions.

Conducting the analysis using this framework was an effective way to understand how gender was considered in Ethiopia's digital strategy. A key reflection

I regularly had during this process, though, was questioning how genuine this commitment to gendered outcomes were; it is easy to mention gendered issues in policy as a ‘tick-box’ exercise, but it is another thing to genuinely consider and how to pursue inclusivity in digital development. This is particularly apt given one of the key conditions the Ethiopian government must satisfy to receive aid is promoting gender equality. To better understand this, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with one man and one woman who had helped write Digital Ethiopia 2025 in an NGO capacity, and a woman member of the Ethiopian government’s Ministry of Innovation and Technology. These interviews suggested that mentions of women and considerations of gender were token, supporting the evidence from literature which suggested Ethiopia’s pursuit of gendered goals was symbolic rather than material (Bekana 2020) these interviews.

I chose not to conduct stage 3 of the CPA process because Ethiopia was in the depths of a civil war while I was performing the analysis which made fieldwork unfeasible.

5.4. Fieldwork (Chapter 4)

Fieldwork was conducted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia across two three-week trips. The limited fieldwork was a result of the continued political instability across Ethiopia since November 2021; this will be elaborated on in the ‘Fieldwork’ chapter.

5.4.1. Semi-structured interviews

Each fieldwork trip involved conducting semi-structured interviews. The first fieldwork trip was an exploratory study using convenience sampling of six men and six women to broadly understand how care is conceptualised in Ethiopia and to gain an initial insight into how ICTs affected people's engagement with care. The interview guide was initially developed from literature on care, specifically care within Ethiopian cultures, and how ICTs can impact care, and refined through pilot interviews and discussions amongst the research team.

The main challenge we encountered was translating the concept of 'care' as there was no direct Amharic translation. Following discussions among the research team, we centred our interviews around the words 'menkebakeb/enkibikabe' (roughly translating to 'care') and 'erdata/merdat' (roughly translating to 'support') to centre our interviews around; pilot interviews introduced a new term, 'digaf/magez,' (roughly translating to help) which was used to capture 'care.' Additionally, self-care was translated to 'irisini menkebakeb.'

Participants held diverse conceptualisations of menkebakeb, erdata and digaf, and struggled to define each clearly and separately, expressing "[they] do not have any clear boundary," "it's kind of confusing to differentiate them," and even that the "concepts are the same." For this reason, the concepts will be merged conceptually throughout the thesis and discussed as 'care' throughout.

This exploratory stage of fieldwork provided insights which informed the next stage of fieldwork. Firstly, the trip allowed me to familiarise myself with the research team and consider how we could best work together. Working with the team allowed me to observe the gender dynamics amongst the team, consisting of myself, one man and one woman for this stage of fieldwork, particularly how the Ethiopian man

researcher could dominate conversation and speak over the woman researcher. To overcome this imbalance of power, I discussed with the researchers how the expression of a variety of views within the research team can help not only improve the research but also better enable us to learn from one another, and how valuing different opinions is a tenet of feminist research and care. We also discussed how positionality affects our perspectives, how we approach research and our ability to connect with interviewees, and that learning from one another was an important way to improve our research. Secondly, I improved my understanding of Addis Ababa as a research location. In addition to becoming acquainted with the area geographically, I developed an understanding of the social composition of the area as well as the politics of the city and country, particularly the public's views of the government and Tigray war, through meeting and talking with people informally.

Thirdly, I saw how my presence at interviews impacted respondent's engagement with interviews. The research team were quick to indicate that my presence at interviews impacted how the respondents answered as well as how much payment they expected to receive upon completing the interview. I consequently removed myself from all post-pilot interviews while also adapting our approach to the interview process to make up for my absence. This included being close by during interviews and having my phone with me in case any issues arose during the interview, conducting the translation process with the interviewer immediately following the interview and discussing the interview throughout this process including clarifying important terms and phrases, and following answers and themes across the interviews to modify the interview guide where appropriate. An example of how we modified the interview guide was by introducing questions regarding ICTs *irisini menkebakeb* as this became a clear theme.

These learnings helped shape my second fieldwork trip which consisted of 25 semi-structured interviews with informal women workers. These interviews aimed to give insights into how ICTs affected how they engaged with care and used an interview guide developed from the previous exploratory work as well as a review of the care and informal economy literature. The interviews were undertaken by three women members of the research team and were audio recorded to then be translated to English. Participants were woman aged 18 or above who were engaged in informal work and had access to ICTs. Women were selected because, based on the exploratory data, women found care to be a burden (compared with men who did not) and conceptualised self-care as a means of allowing them to care for others (compared with men who were often individualistic in their views of self-care). Further, informally working women were selected because of the Ethiopian government's focus on creating employment opportunities for women and how this may force women into a 'double workday' due to their social role as primary caregivers, and because the informal sector is invisible in policy and generally consists of marginalised members of society.

Building from the exploratory trip, I again emphasised the importance of embracing a variety of perspectives within the team as a means of mutual learning and to improve the quality of the research. One such example was in developing the selection criteria for these interviews. In wanting to interview informal women workers, the research team and I discussed potential research locations, with numerous options being proposed by members of the team, including Megenagna Square and Merkato markets, according to their subjective preferences. I ultimately selected Megenagna Square because:

- it was an area with a high number of informal workers, and
-

- previous research on informal workers had been conducted there; this provided good background regarding the demographics of informal workers in the area which was important given the short timeframe of the research.

By promoting the views of the entire team, I led the research in a way which drew from the concrete knowledge of each team member which served to improve the quality of the research.

We also used a similar interviewing process to the exploratory trip which involved separating myself from the interviews as the local researchers said my presence would impact the data and discussing every interview during the translation process. During the interview, I remained close—only a 15-minute walk away—and always had my phone with me in case I was needed urgently. We translated and discussed the interviews together after they were completed and adjusted the interview guide as the answers suggested. For example, instead of directly asking how ICTs impacted how respondents engaged with care, we asked them to describe their engagement with care now and before they used ICTs, thereby seeing how ICTs impacted their engagement without asking directly.

My improved understanding of Addis Ababa also helped me to appreciate how heterogeneous the city was as a melting pot of people who had migrated from across the country, in many cases in search of better opportunities. This encouraged me to explore sampling methods which could capture this heterogeneity within informal women workers; I ultimately chose to develop a social map to guide sampling, as elaborated upon in the ‘Social mapping’ section.

5.4.1.1. Challenges

We faced several challenges interviewing informal women workers which offer opportunities for reflection. Firstly, interviews took place at the workers' workspace on the side of the street; this was a compromise we made with interviewees because they were unwilling to be interviewed in a quieter separate location and risk forgoing the potential income they could gain while interviewing. This caused some interviewees to occasionally be distracted during their interview due to police presence and customers purchasing goods. Secondly, due to the low income of informal women workers, this population rarely had access to ICTs more sophisticated than a brick phone. This limited how significantly ICTs impacted how interviewees engaged with care as internet access could, for example, provide information which could improve the competence of the carer (as identified in our exploratory research). Finally, some interviews were exceedingly short, lasting 20 minutes. The research team found that some interviewees were in a rush, particularly in the evenings or when police were around, which affected the depth of the answers as well as the richness of the data collected. Although interviewers were trained to be inquisitive and seek greater depth and detail in the respondents' answers using prompts and probing questions, this still limited the quality of the data as prompts partly guide the respondent.

The question I often ask myself, upon reflection, is: 'given these challenges, should I have changed research populations during the fieldwork?' Indeed, this was a question we as a research team contended with following the pilot interviews when we considered shifting to formally employed women workers. While I have no doubt that the quality of the research was impacted by these challenges, it was important that we continued working with informal women workers for this work because they will play a significant role in Ethiopia's development while being invisible in development policies. They were chosen because women are overrepresented in Ethiopia's informal

economy, which generally comprises the poor and marginalised sections of society who are employed with little or no social protection.

I think we could have improved our approach to collect richer data, however. We could have, for example, adapted our interview methods by meeting and interviewing participants in their homes, helped them with their work while interviewing, or met with respondents multiple times. These approaches could have helped respondents focus more on the interview rather than be worried about their income or police or could have offered more time for workers to engage with the interview. We could also have used different or additional research methods, including a phenomenological approach or photovoice. These methods could have captured much more detailed and holistic data to develop a fuller picture of how ICTs impacted participants' engagement with care. Importantly though, making these changes would have required us to conduct fewer interviews given the time constraints of the research. We conducted 25 interviews because it was suggested in the literature that this is the appropriate amount required to reach thematic saturation. Potentially, prioritising deeper data, such as through the changes mentioned, would have been an appropriate decision for this research population to ultimately reach data saturation in a more appropriate way.

5.4.2. Social mapping

My second stint of fieldwork began with socially mapping Megegnagna Square in Addis Ababa with the aim of understanding how the area was divided into different social and geographical areas of informal women workers, including who the most vulnerable workers were. This involved informally talking with people in the area,

including workers, to understand how informal women workers arranged themselves. We found that the most vulnerable workers were not separable by location because many informal workers did not have a fixed location for their business, rather they were separable by the times at which they worked. The most vulnerable people typically worked in the mornings from 6:00 – 7:00 am, during the middle of the day from 12:00 – 1:00 pm, or during weekends.

The social map we developed informed our sampling procedure. We firstly sampled purposively by dividing interviews according to time, ensuring we captured a variety of voices by conducting at least four interviews during each of the key periods of vulnerability, and then secondly, we sampled randomly within these times by approaching every third woman vendor. This randomisation was done as a means of reducing bias and because groups of friends often set their businesses up in the same small area. We also sought to purposively capture the views of elderly workers or workers living with a disability as a means of capturing the voices of further vulnerable groups. As a result of the illegal nature of informal work, however, which saw workers often running away from police due to the threat of the police stealing their products, we were unable to find anyone of these characteristics who fit our inclusion criteria.

5.4.3. Thematic analysis

Fieldwork data were analysed using an inductive thematic analysis methodology. This was chosen because of the exploratory nature of the research questions and because of the translation process involved during the data collection process. Data was coded reflexively using NVivo, constructing the codes and themes

from the data through an iterative process while also actively acknowledging the expectations of the researchers and how that may impact the themes that arise.

The analysis process involved the following steps:

1. Become familiar with the data (translate and transcribe)
2. Search for patterns in the data through coding
3. Identify initial themes
4. Review initial themes and adapt
5. Repeat step 4 until themes are finalised

5.5. Theoretical development (Chapter 5)

Inspired by informal discussion with people who worked or had worked in the field of evaluation, the theoretical development of the 'Care Approach' included different approaches to evaluation, the feminist ethics of care, and conceptualisations of care, as well as grey literature like the evaluation guidelines of international organisations. Once I had conducted this reading, it was important to recognise the gap in the evaluation literature which the feminist ethic of care could fit. I identified that, although there were approaches to evaluation which drew from the principles of care, namely responsive evaluation, there weren't any approaches which pulled from substantive and sociopolitical care. Combining these focuses with the feminist ethic of care provided the foundation from which the Care Approach to evaluation was developed.

To define the driving principles of the Care Approach I drew from the overarching goal of the approach: to inform evaluation that combats the oppressive

gendered social arrangements present in heavily patriarchal societies so that programmes can be established in which women and girls are empowered to pursue gender equality. This led to the development of four guiding principles: consideration of caring relationships, collective acknowledgement and responsibility, community wellbeing, and care for evaluation practice. These principles captured the importance of care and relationality in programme outcomes, the impacts of gendered caring roles in people's ability to engage in programmes, promoted epistemic justice while shifting accountability of the evaluation to the community, and prioritised cultural competency and responsiveness throughout the evaluation process. A feminist ethic of care epistemology, prioritising context and particularity, partiality, concreteness, and emotions as an epistemological complement to rationality, underlies how each of these principles are approached.

An important aspect of this method was selecting an appropriate evaluation example to exemplify how the Care Approach could guide evaluation as a means of grounding the theory. Given the topic of this thesis is gender equity in digital development, I would ideally have used an evaluation of a digital inclusion programme in Ethiopia as an example. However, I was unable to find any publicly available evaluations of such programmes nor were any organisations happy to send me private detailed evaluations which I felt were appropriate to use as an example. The Transform Programme, a programme seeking to improve maternal, newborn and child health, along with family planning (MNCH/FP), outcomes, was used as the evaluation example because it presented a detailed evaluation of a heavily gendered programme in Ethiopia. It was significant that the programme took place in Ethiopia because the unique political and cultural nuances of the country were required to fit the Ethiopian case study of the thesis. Additionally, such a programme has numerous similarities to

a digital inclusion programme which, I believe, make it an appropriate substitute for a digital inclusion programme. Firstly, the impact gendered caring roles can have on people's engagement with the programme because women's caring roles often constrain their engagement with digital programmes while men's caring roles can leave them unconsidered in a MNCH/FP programme. Secondly, digital inclusion programmes place a significant focus on women to promote inclusivity given the digital gender divide while the Transform Programme's primary focus was on women as part of promoting MNCH/FP. Finally, MNCH/FP and digital literacy both have important relational effects, like affecting children's health outcomes and impacting how care is given, respectively.

6. Ethics

I was reticent of numerous ethical issues throughout my research, the first of which was how my positionality affected my research, particularly during my fieldwork. Prior to travelling to Ethiopia, I had theoretical knowledge of the context as well as limited contextual knowledge from my MPhil research. While in Ethiopia, I was humble to accept that I did not have sufficient understanding of the society and engaged in multiple discussions to help me understand the context better. I also engaged specifically with the research team about the research and was grateful to hear their feedback on my proposed questions and research approach. Our joint work also helped to find benefits from the insider and outsider positions. As an outsider, I did not have good contextual knowledge, but I had a fresh perspective on care and gender relations that insiders did not have as, for them, the local gender relations were 'natural.' Mutual learning was beneficial for the work and our approach.

The second ethical difficulty I faced was conducting research during a period of political instability in Ethiopia, particularly when local researchers would be collecting data. My research was shaped significantly by the Tigray War in Ethiopia, including reducing my engagement with fieldwork, in addition to changing my research location and restricting my movements while in Addis Ababa due to safety concerns; for example, I was to minimise my how much I left the hotel at night. This concern for my safety was juxtaposed with the local researchers conducting interviews in Megenagna Square, sometimes at night. Although specific concerns for my safety as a foreign white man differ from those of local women researchers, it was somewhat problematic having researchers conduct research in an area I should not be according to my university risk assessment; this was particularly so given we were to prioritise conducting some interviews at night to ensure we captured the voices of vulnerable informal women workers who would be working at that time.

To alleviate my concerns, we looked to the local researchers' agency to see whether they were comfortable conducting interviews in the area at night. Their concrete knowledge of their safety in the area was much more reliable than my theoretical knowledge and I trusted them to make the best decision for them. This decision was complicated, however, given the researchers were being paid to conduct research and there was a financial incentive for them to conduct the interviews even if they felt unsafe. While there was nothing I could do to fully 'solve' this as I felt it was my responsibility as the lead researcher, I regularly reminded them that we could find ways to adjust the data collection strategy such that they would not have to conduct interviews at night if they felt unsafe. Ultimately, they felt comfortable conducting interviews at night.

The third ethical issue I faced was how much to pay for respondents for their time and local researchers for their efforts. To me, the initial question of whether we should pay respondents, was simply 'yes' because this was a means of providing some benefit to the respondents; Mckeganey (2001) argues that providing payment encourages respondents to provide data they think the interviewer wants to hear, thus questions were designed such that similar questions were asked multiple times to identify inconsistencies in responses as a means of hearing the genuine views and experiences of interviewees. Discussions with the local research team led us to determine that paying 200 birr for their time was fair; again, this was primarily based on the concrete knowledge of the local researchers as my initial suggestions were well under what was considered fair for the context.

Remunerating local researchers fairly for their work was a difficult issue I faced given their expected rate of remuneration was higher than I could afford. This resulted in us negotiating what was fair compensation and decided on an amount that I could afford as well as working together on the paper that I—and now we—intended to produce. I had always hoped to work together on the paper with the local researchers as I felt it was important to include their perspectives and input and would also lead to an improved paper consequently. During this negotiation though, not publishing the paper was something I'd not foreseen; I had taken it as certain that we would publish a paper from the data. That this was an assumption has proven to be an important learning for me from this situation as I essentially negotiated with something that I, in this case, could not deliver.

7. Methodological reflections

I've reflected on my methodology throughout this section, not just in terms of recounting what happened, but also in terms of briefly discussing some learnings and reflections. In this final section I will briefly discuss one last reflection: the difficulty of undertaking fieldwork in such a short timeframe and the importance of the researcher having a relationship with the place they are researching in. Given my fieldwork in Addis Ababa was the first time I spent extended time in the city, six weeks was insufficient for method development and learning about the context. The limited timeframe for fieldwork impacted research design and meant I was very limited in how I could engage in the data collection process in addition to being unable to develop an appropriate level of concrete knowledge of the context. Although I have previously described why I continued working in Ethiopia, this fieldwork experience reinforced to me the importance of having a relationship with the research context not only to improve the research quality, but also ethically as an outsider in the community.
