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# Public Policy, Collaborative Governance, and Female Entrepreneurship in the Caribbean: A Critical Assessment

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**Abstract:** Despite the growing implementation of entrepreneurial policies within the Caribbean and the recognition of the structural and relational challenges that impact women entrepreneurs, there is little discussion on the possibilities for using collaborative governance practices to empower and enhance the lives of women in that space. These gaps centre not just the inadequacies of the public policy process, but also those related to governance practices that underpin the contexts for women entrepreneurs. Where these gaps remain indicative of broader limitations within the ideological framing of managerialism within the public policy process, it is important to disrupt the political and social imaginaries embedded within the thinking and practices of female entrepreneurship within the region. The paper will therefore adopt a post-structural feminist approach and that of critical discourse analysis to assess the degree of consultation within the public policy process, the extent to which this identifies and addresses the concerns of women in the sector, and the implications for reframing public policy as a collaborative governance process. The intentions are both to illuminate the relevance of collaboration and participation within dialogue as an extension of consultation but also as a requirement for addressing matters of inclusivity, visibility, and equity within the public policy process.

**Keywords:** Collaborative Governance, Public Policy, Female Entrepreneurship, Caribbean, Dialogue

## Introduction

While entrepreneurship as an economic activity has the potential to secure sustainable futures for global citizens, major apprehensions remain. Key concerns for the systemic inequalities that negatively impact entrepreneurial opportunities and experiences for diverse groups (Raman et al. 2022). In fact, there is substantive literature to suggest that entrepreneurial possibilities are constrained by prevailing ideological, structural, and cultural framings of the global marketplace; a reality, which differently impacts the identities, experiences, outcomes, and trajectories for women who engage within that space (Ahl and Marlow 2021; Marlow and Martinez-Dy 2018;

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Bianco, Lombe and Bolis 2017). In question are the hegemonic neoliberal representations of entrepreneurship and of the normative pathways to self-actualisation within the market (Lemke 2001). The discursive, structural, and political aspects of how and why women are situated to experience and disrupt existing barriers for their engagement also unfold as areas of contention. . To a large extent, the conversation around these precarious realities connects issues of patriarchy (Ahl and Nelson 2015), contextuality (Welter and Baker 2020), spatiality (Autio et al. 2014), and positionality (Villares-Varela and Essers 2019) to those of the broader complexities and ambiguities for women entrepreneurs within the Global North. There is, however, a lack of scholarship on the realities for women across diverse social geographies and for developing countries in the Global South, where issues of size, comparative advantage, global market share, and cultural typecasts uniquely challenge their engagement (Radice 2011; Esnard and Knight 2020). Such is the case for the small island developing countries like the Caribbean, where deficit perspectives around the familial motivations (Terjesena and Amorós 2010) and levels of informality (Lashley and Smith 2015) collectively limit the potential for regional scholarship on female entrepreneurship, and for more concerted efforts to address some of the barriers to entry and participation (Barriteau 2002; Bernard 2012).

A related contention is also with the deficiencies within the processes and outcomes of entrepreneurial policies. Thus, while there is some acknowledgement that public policy advancements have increased access for women to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Henry, Orser, Coleman, and Foss 2017), ongoing calls remain for more context-specific strategic objectives (Henry, Foss, and Ahl 2016; Welter, Brush and de Bruin 2014), and for the use of more critical perspectives that better situate the experiences of women within the promotion of business startup and growth (Foss, Henry, Ahl, and Mikalsen 2019; Orser, Riding, and Li 2019). To take this conversation forward, this study uses discourse analysis within a post-structuralist-feminist framework to assess the nature and significance of this policy-context-actor dilemma for the Caribbean. Key lines of inquiry are, therefore, the extent to which existing entrepreneurial policies (i) consider the identities and positionalities of women, and (ii) centre their participation and contribution within the process. These examinations inform discussions on the limitations of consultative processes inherent within the public policy process but also of the promise and challenge of collaborative governance. This exploration and contextualisation of the policy dialogue process within the context of the Caribbean region is particularly important for enhancing the relevance of dialogue, reach (particularly for those for whom these policies are intended) and developmental impacts of these.

## Policy Dialogue and Collaborative Governance

While there is no consensus on what policy dialogue is, there is some acknowledgement of the need to address matters of inclusion and participation as a way to ensure collective decision making within policy dialogue (United Nations [UN] 2007). Dialogue in this sense is represented as a process of using conversation to build mutual understanding, trust, and reciprocity for the broader purpose of reaching shared understanding, accommodation, and outcomes (Lazoroska and Palm 2019). This dialogic exchange has been framed, therefore, as an inquiry into building a community of collaborators (Inness and Booher 2009, 2010) with the capacity to address matters related to power and resource imbalances (both at interpersonal and societal level). This notion and practice of dialogic exchange have also been extended to tackle the relevance of political contexts (with considerations of legislative and regulatory dimensions) and prospects for negotiation, whether around the definition of the problem, rules, and/or issues of fairness in the process (Emerson, Nabatchi and Balough 2012). These concessions, however, call into question the extent to which power dynamics impact the possibilities for intersubjectivity, relativity, and inclusivity within policy dialogues (Escobar 2011; Ganesh and Holmes 2011). Issues, therefore, of association, influence, and negotiation between collaborators become important points of investigation when dialogue is applied as a governance tool within the public policy process (Nabyonga-Orem *et al.* 2016). This collaborative process, however, requires an analysis of *power structures and discourses in dialogue* as opposed *the power in dialogue as a practice* to unpack the types of actions, actors, and outcomes that are associated with the public policy process. The connections between dialogue, power, and empowerment are critical points to move beyond the ambivalences related to dialogue (Hammond, Anderson, and Cissna 2003).

This work takes forward collaborative dialogue theory but with a post-structural feminist turn as a way to bring attention to the practice of dialogue within the public policy process for the region. Collaborative governance is represented as a strategy to build engagement and relationships with multiple stakeholders to ensure a consensus-oriented approach within the decision-making process (See Ansell and Gash 2008; Innes and Booher 2009, 2010). The collaborative dialogue theory problematises the potential for power and authority to sustain ongoing forms of conflict among stakeholders and pushes for a collaborative rationalisation of the public policy process that is generated and sustained by an orientation towards consensus (Ansell and Gash 2008). This type of stakeholder involvement is presented as a public policy innovation that centres the importance of shared motivation, reciprocal relations, co-production of knowledge and capacity for collective action. This form of collaborative engagement stands as a measure of good governance that takes into consideration the 'processes and structures of public policy decision making and

management' within the engagement of stakeholders (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012, 2). Yet, it is this issue of participation, as an expression of who, why, and how people are involved in the dialogic process, which emerges as a major cause of concern in the public policy process. This is particularly the case given the observation that the needs and values of actors beyond the public sector often do not find their way into the public policy contexts (Wade 2004; Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh 2012). This policy-actor-integration perspective therefore calls into question the cultures or norms that guide practice (Dovlo, Nabyonga-Orem, Estrelli, and Mwisongo 2016), the relations of power between actors (Hoppe 2011; Pieczka and Escobar 2013), the levels of inclusion and/or collaboration (Goodin and Dryzek 2006), and implications for collective decision making within the policy dialogue process (Monteduro and Hinna 2008). A push, therefore, is for more diverse methods, with the use of critical perspectives and methods as (counter)stories/narratives and observations to better assess whose interests are being served and who is involved within the design and implementation of the policy process (Edwards 2012; Escobar 2011). This work centres aspects of power and dialogue closer within the theorisation of dialogue and interventions to situate and question the assumptions related to the process, actors, and outcomes.

## **Situating a Post-Structuralist Feminist-Discursive Inquiry**

Post-structural feminism is uniquely positioned to capture discursive and dialogic inquiry. Central to this point of interrogation is the contextual, ideological, structural, and social aspects of power that coalesce to influence subjugated knowledge, rights, and identities (Sekulic 2010; Soares 2006; Ness, Miller, Negash, and Morgan 2017). A major benefit of this approach is that it centres the ways in which agency is not only contingent on discursive tendencies and self-regulation (Davies 2000), but also upon the strategies or policies that exist to break down patriarchal structures, norms, and practices (Davies and Gannon 2006). In the context of the public policy process, this analytical framework captures the heteronormative assumptions related to entrepreneurship and the impact for the framings, allocations, expectations, experiences, and outcomes for women (Henry, Foss and Ahl 2016; Wu, Li, and Yang 2019). This kind of entrepreneurship-gender-policy discourse analysis, as is the approach within this paper, situates specific issues of power (whether structural, cultural, economic, or political) in relation to those of representation, engagement, and empowerment of relevant stakeholders (Ahl 2006; Foss, Henry, Ahl, and Mikalsen 2019). This analysis of the subject-in-relation to the policy offers a unique way of assessing the significance of the discursive practices within regulatory framework to the social and economic constitution of everyday life (Davies and Gannon 2006).

The use of discourse analysis as a method of data analysis within this paper presents, therefore, a critical way to locate the layered aspects of power within the social, cultural, and political underpinnings of the policy process. Key points of examination are those of the meanings, contexts, practices, and relationships that are evident through written texts and the extent to which these cover diverse voices and experiences of actors within the space. These points of interrogation centre (i) the dialectical relations between power, discourse, and representation and (ii) the structures and processes through which these dialogues emerge and are sustained to influence the process of social transformations (Fairclough 2010; Widdowson 1995; Bondarouk and Ruel 2004). This type of analysis can be critically extended within examinations of entrepreneurial policy documents to assess the extent to which the challenges for women are addressed through public policy and are connected to issues of power and dominance as constructed through the practice of public dialogue. The paper is, therefore, premised on the examinations of the methodological and procedural/consultative aspects of the public policy process, as stated within existing entrepreneurial policies for three Caribbean countries, where entrepreneurial policies exist, namely Jamaica, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago. For comparative purposes, the paper does not include a review of the entrepreneurial policy for Barbados, where little information is available on the policy process. Once collated, these policy documents were reviewed to identify the structures, strategies, and discourses that feed into the public policy design and implementation process to impact women entrepreneurs in the region. This analysis is a way to trouble the taken-for-granted discursive and dialogic practices within public policy and to better reflect on the gaps and possibilities for female entrepreneurship.

## **The Case of Belize**

On a broad level, Belize offers a unique case where matters of inclusivity are consistently referenced across the National MSME Policy and Strategy report (2012), the National Entrepreneurship Strategy (2014), the National Entrepreneurial Ecosystem workplan (2016–2019), and the National MSME Strategy and Roadmap for Belize (2022–2025). Collectively, these documents provide insights into the identification of problems across diverse actors within this sector, the tools that are applied to manage these, and drawbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic for this sector.

Methodologically, these policy documents, however, are devoid of any substantive discussion on the type and nature of the participation of women's entrepreneurs and the significance of this for the strategic objectives developed through this consultative process. Such is the case of the National MSME Policy and Strategy report (2012), which elaborates on two methods of data collection, namely the broad application of survey research and the use of consultations to establish a legislative

foundation for MSMEs, namely the MSME Development Act and the Belize Agency for Development of Enterprise. In the first instance, there is some reference within the discussion of the survey design to the engagement of diverse social groups including young persons (26%) and Mestizo (45%) across diverse communities (San Ignacio, Belize city, Orange Walk, Corozal, Punta Gorda, and Dangriga), with 43% or 56/130 of women within the survey. However, there is no discussion on the proportion or percentage of the suggestions made for or by women involved in MSMEs and of the nature of the questions developed within the questionnaire to address the experiences for women. The actual survey was also not available, leaving no indication of the depth or scope of issues addressed through this consultative process. In the second instance, the policy speaks to the use of activity-oriented engagement and dialogue, but with a narrow inclusion of actors, specifically, the state and established economic players as powerful brokers within this process.<sup>2</sup> There is no mention of women entrepreneurs as part of this cohort or group of persons consulted or visibility of the issues that impact women entrepreneurs in the sector. This absence of women as collaborators is also evident in the National Entrepreneurship Strategy (2014), which speaks to collaborative engagement of technical experts and ministerial officials, but with no indication of the involvement of women entrepreneurs. These gaps are also evident in the National Entrepreneurial Ecosystem workplan (2016–2019), where the emphasis is on the management tools developed to support the strategic pillars of the National Entrepreneurial Strategy, but with limited collaboration that includes only external consultations and stakeholders including technical and methodological experts.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the National MSME strategy and roadmap for Belize (2022–2025), which though developed through collaborative efforts of international and national agencies, private sector organisations, and non-governmental organisations<sup>4</sup>, shows some effort at inclusion, with just over 30% of women across small and medium size enterprises. However, there is no gender-based disaggregation based on level of education, industries, access to technology, level of support needed, financial or otherwise.

The lack of treatment around the experiences of women also remains a source for concern. A review of existing policies shows that many of the strategic initiatives do

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2 Economic players were limited here to MSME business support organisations, owners, Belize trade and investment development service, managers, and their employees.

3 These include staff within the Gender Department and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

4 United Nations Development Program, BELTRAIDE, Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) and National Women's Commission as a regional centre for the promotion of entrepreneurship.

not address the power structures that exist at the interpersonal, sectoral, or societal levels. Thus, while the National MSME policy and Strategy report (2012) underscored the need for ‘traditional financial institutions with a technical assistance component...and with special attention given to women, youth, and small farmers’ (p. 19), the preamble on these initiatives does not acknowledge or refer to any structural or relational underpinnings that frame their positionality with that space. This lack of treatment of the domains of power that influence the positionality of women is also evident within the National Entrepreneurship Strategy (2014), which on a very generic level provides a list of strategic initiatives around education, finance, and legislation. As such, despite the acknowledgement of social deprivation as a major challenge for women’s engagement within this sector, there are no gender specific policies or initiatives within this policy document. This limitation is also extended to that of the National Entrepreneurial Ecosystem workplan (2016–2019), which, on one end, advances the conversation on the need for ‘human rights approach[es]’ that do not discriminate or ‘...[distinguish between] race, religion, sex, gender, [and beliefs]’ (p.19). On the other end, this discourse on human rights approaches within entrepreneurial policy design and implementation does not include specific policy initiatives that are supportive of women within this sector. There is also no mention or interrogation of other intersections related to other socially constituted criteria for difference within the workplan. The power imbalances, as they exist for women within this sector, therefore, remain substantively obscure and without any actionable strategies for tackling the inequalities that impact the outcomes of this process.

## **The Case of Jamaica**

Jamaica has a micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises, and entrepreneurship policy (2018), as a revised version from 2013, with some amendments based on the strategic mandates and considerations from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report for Jamaica, 2016/2017. On the surface, the policy as written unfolds as an outcome of multiple stakeholder engagements with the use of thematic working groups, national consultations, and validation workshops. Like Belize, these engagements were framed on a consultative process with the use of surveys and focus groups. To some extent, these various forms of engagement align with the process of good governance with a space for multiple voices and representations within the policy process. Even within this approach, the consultations remain limited. Thus, what obtains is the centrality of ministerial representatives (particularly from the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture, and Fisheries), private sector agents, and non-governmental actors as key stakeholders within the policy dialogue process. The inclusion of the (i) Bureau of Gender Affairs, Jamaica Chamber of Commerce (JCC), (ii) Jamaica Agricultural Society, (iii) Ministry of Culture, Gender, Enter-

tainment and Sport, (iv) Small Business Association of Jamaica (SBAJ), (v) MSME Alliance, (vi) Women Entrepreneur Network of the Caribbean Initiative (WENC), and (vii) Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica (PSOJ) emerges here as representative of the actors and the voices that inform notions of shared understanding and planning of entrepreneurial interventions. While these collaborations, including the more recent ones with the Bureau of Gender Affairs and the Branson Center for Entrepreneurship, are promising initiatives that promote participation within the public policy process, what remains absent within the discourse on inclusion is the presence, if any, of women entrepreneurs within this dialogue, and of the level of engagement that followed from this process.

The centrality of women's issues within the strategic objectives of public policy are also critical to the enhancement of their experiences within the sector. In the framing of this discourse, the challenge of entrepreneurial engagement is presented as financial and informational deficits within the market. While there are hints of gender-based initiatives that appear in sections, with strategies to make available financing and relevant market information for women, there is no contextualisation of these struggles, or reference in the reporting to how these initiatives provide equitable access and systems of support for women in the sector. The actual policy for Jamaica, however, captures some key components of the conceptualisations around enterprise and entrepreneurial development, with an emphasis on the economic imperatives of the sector, including discussions on the need to create enabling environments, provide business support, create a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, or to add social value to the business development process and to enhance competitiveness. The discourse around enterprise development, however, is substantively devoid of discussions on the intersectional precarities for women and of the need to develop policy frameworks that are responsive to the positions that they occupy in the market. In that regard, the reference to 'inclusive growth' (Government of Jamaica 2017, 22), which is central to the policy, and to the expectations for social sustainability, is not balanced with how inclusivity is either conceived, captured, and promoted to represent the interest and experiences of diverse actors, including women. While the attention to these issues of equity and inclusivity are commendable, with the mainstreaming of policy to support women and persons with disability, there is a lack of critical intersectional frameworks to direct or guide collective sharing, capacity building, and business support as quintessential to the creation of equitable contexts. With the need for MSMEs to serve as the catalysts for human, social, and economic development, or as key drivers for social and economic measures of progress, it is important that these diversities and precarities also feature within the policy design and implementation process.



## The Case of Trinidad and Tobago

The micro and small enterprise development policy for Trinidad and Tobago (2014–2016), recognises the need and potential for driving enterprise and entrepreneurial development. To that end, the policy design as written brings attention to the conditions and challenges within the business environment as central to the areas to be addressed within the policy process. The attention to the business environment is also reinforced through the analysis of the political economy and geo-political relations that impact entrepreneurial orientations within Trinidad and Tobago. Such is evident in the review of documents within the policy of the Trinidad and Tobago Medium-Term Policy Framework (2011–2014), the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development's Strategic Plan (2011–2015), and the Enterprise Development Policy and Strategic Plan for Trinidad and Tobago (2001–2005). There is also evidence of dialogue within the framing of enterprise and entrepreneurial development with the use of public consultations held in 2012 and 2013. Like the case of Jamaica, the iteration of dialogue is limited to the engagement of public entities with the central role of the Enterprise Development Division within the Ministry of Labour and that of the Small Enterprise Development. These public consultations informed the reliance of state agencies (the Small Business Company and the National Enterprise Development Company Limited) and on related policies (namely the Fair Share and Green Enterprise Development policies) as regulative mechanisms to support small business development. There is no discussion on the inclusion of women entrepreneurs or on whether the challenges for women were indirectly addressed within these dialogues. A related outcome of these gaps and forms of exclusion, therefore, is a framing of enterprise and entrepreneurial development within this discourse that is reduced to generalised indicators that support business development, market network, financing, trade and investment, training, and advocacy (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago [GORTT] 2014), with financial support from dominant actors within this process, namely public representatives.

Dialogue in this case remains removed from collaborative governance principles. A central focus is on the reproduction of normative framings around enterprise and entrepreneurial development, with some focus on business development, support, diversification, and wealth creation. While there is some treatment of equality, social responsibility, and sustainability as key principles within the entrepreneurial process, this is not significantly elaborated or operationalised, and with little insight as to how these concepts are understood and/or actionable. As such, the strategic objectives remain vaguely described, with reference to 'Special Areas for Social Development' as indicative of a gender-sensitive response, and of the commitment to, '...focus on the gender gap' (GORTT 2014, 24). While the reference and inclusion of

this gender-sensitive consideration represents a step in the right direction, the actual activities or initiatives under these strategic objectives remain vague with general information on cross-sectoral partnerships to meet the needs of women entrepreneurs. Even where, 'Future Policies and Programmes for Development' that support women are highlighted within a sub-section of the entrepreneurial policy for Trinidad and Tobago, there is little treatment of the nature of these initiatives and on the participation of women within the process of designing and/or implementing these programmes (GORTT 2014, 28). The discourse around these constructions of entrepreneurial activities therefore makes visible the silences around ongoing exclusion and sustained marginalisation of women within policy dialogues. These gaps represent some key points for further interrogation and intervention.

## Discussion

Systems of social inequalities within the Caribbean remain complex with structural, relational, and discursive parameters that both enable and restrict women's entrepreneurial activities. Contesting gender scripts as an aspect of social inequality to promote women's empowerment, however, requires tackling structural and relational aspects of women's experiences within this entrepreneurial landscape. Such a reality deepens the call for more strategic approaches that engender democratic engagement and the broader sustainability of entrepreneurial women. A dialogic method/practice, with elements of participatory or collaborative governance, presents an opportunity to bridge the gap between the goals of equity and sustainability. This shift calls for a move beyond the limitations of a consultative process to a more collaborative one, where there are possibilities for mutual learning, exchange, networking, and sharing, but with the inclusion of those for whom policies are being designed and implemented.

Examinations of the policy documents for the region, however, point to the existence of more managerial and adversarial approaches, with some inclusion of public and private partners, but without clear demonstration through the written policies of how women entrepreneurs were engaged in the process. Dialogue in these written policy documents therefore appears to be restricted to key/established actors (public and private representatives) but without any substantive details on the treatment and recognition of the voices that are or are not included within the process. This limited insight on the level of women's participation is particularly concerning given the consensus that a conventional approach to policy design and implementation remains necessary but not sufficient to ensure inclusivity and participation (Fusheini and Marnoch, 2020). Participation in this sense is restrictive, with public and private sector agents as power brokers speaking on behalf of primary actors, but with the

potential for a collaborative thrust to centre the relevance of dialogue as a primarily tool for leading integration within the public policy process.

As it stands, therefore, the public policy process around entrepreneurship within the region floats within the maintenance of the established status quo and that of the mandates for inclusion and equity. Here, the lack of understanding and placement of the key actors within this process, of relevant representational and relational strategies to address the concerns of women entrepreneurs' positions, and/or to be part of the design and implementation of public policy emerge as missing aspects and points of engagement. This outward treatment of inclusivity within the dialogic policy process raises more pointed questions related to representation and participation with an absence of formalised information sharing or joint decision making within the policy. While these public-private sector partnerships are particularly needed given the longstanding issues facing women entrepreneurs in Jamaica (Government of Jamaica [GOJ] 2013; Saner and Yii 2019), issues of equity in Trinidad and Tobago (Bailey, Pacheo, Carillo, Pemberton, and Ghany 2015; Kelly, Brush, Greene, and Litovsky 2013; Giles, Schmid, and Waithe 2018) the inclusion of primary actors within small business enterprises cannot be masked within the dynamics of these relationships and power structures. The technical model, therefore, which centres more on the analysis, regulation, and implementation of strategic objectives appears devoid of these diverse realities, contexts, and voices. A major risk of these managerial and adversarial approaches if these are sustained within the policy process, therefore, is the stifling of democracy, inclusivity, and equity, which, as a process, reproduces the knowledge and practices that are linked to existing systems of power (International Labor Organization 2021).

This centring of participatory justice can be proffered through the framework of collaborative governance. While adversarial politics may persist with some semblance of participatory engagements, the aim is to transform hierarchical undertones within the process and move towards more cooperative alliances among and between actors (Ansell and Gash 2008). This approach grounds the importance of governance within the dialogic process and practice to help reduce inherent risks and possible exclusions that can emerge within public-private engagement. This paper therefore advances the call for the use of a post-structural lens to examine the context, discourse, and action surrounding women's entrepreneurship, and, moreso, for consideration of representation and openness to collaborative governance that is not restricted solely to private-public consultations. Where stakeholder dialogues represent an important aspect of creating public value and innovation within the public policy making process, it is important, therefore, to rethink and reframe issues of selection, representation, and transformation related to collaborative governance. This type of process innovation is grounded within the use not just of collaborative governance but also

of alternative dialogues and positioning of marginalised actors to inform change agendas. Even where public-private structures form the basis of consultative processes to inform policy, it is important to drive narratives that promote shared responsibility and open dialogue with opportunities for primary actors to become involved in the process of problem definition and decision making, rather than to depend on the secondary representation of their perspectives through institutionalised actors within the public policy process. These also call for analyses of power structures and dynamics that symbolically and materially impact the lines of authority and authenticity in the public policy process.

From a post-structuralist perspective, changing the public policy process and openness to engagement calls for attention to equity and social justice. Moving in this direction spotlights the need to address systemic issues of power, with examinations of the structures, relations, representations, and actions that impact women within the entrepreneurial space. The call is also for more innovative methodologies and post-structural feminist sensitivities to shift away from generic policy initiatives (Ahl and Nelson 2015; Ahl and Marlow 2019) and to map the multiple meanings, practices, identities, and structures that frame the discourses related to the roles, expectations, and actions between and among actors (Henry, Foss and Ahl 2016). Yet, the demands of capitalist production and the dislocation of Caribbean countries within the global landscape (Girvan 2010; Levitt 2009) call for an assessment of the broader macroeconomic, ideological, and structural deficiencies that differently position and impact women within entrepreneurship (Barriteau 2001, Hall 2011; Reddock 2011; Duffy, Kline, Mowatt, and Chancellor 2015). These contradictions and sources of conflict also impact their access and engagement to becoming critical stakeholders in the public policy process. Given the historical challenges related to the high incidence of female-headed households in the region and the levels of necessity-based entrepreneurial activity that exist for women in the region (Amorós *et al.* 2016), it is also important to understand how the household as a core unit of analysis can provide deeper insights into constructions of identity, risk, and economic activity for women (Barriteau 2002). In so doing, it is also important for policy makers to address the connections between identities and social inequalities based on race (Ryan 2012), gender (Barriteau 2002), gendered racism (Hossein 2014) class (Freeman 2014), as well as the different constellations of power that have unfolded across historical and contemporary periods to impact the positionality, (in)visibility, and marginality of women within the labour market (see Barriteau 2001; Coppin 1995). A post-structuralist perspective offers, therefore, a framework for also working through and pushing back against the contextualities that weigh in on the positionalities and strategic priorities for addressing persistent concerns for women in the sector. While the integration of these types of structural and social analysis may not immediately alter the context and practice, it represents an import-

ant step towards humanising individual and shared identities and cooperation that can equalise the public policy process.

As a process, however, the examination of entrepreneurial policies in the Caribbean show that the intersectional realities for women and engagement of women within the sector are less than reflected within the documentation of the public policy process. The still contested perceptions and positions of women within the labour market also require that policy frameworks centre and adapt issues of human rights (Popielek 2019) and work-life integration (Reddock and Bobb-Smith 2008; UNDP 2021). These concerns are particularly important given the contradictions within the market and those of the ameliorative measures that have been implemented to address gender inequality within the region (Barriteau 2001). The calls for more intersectional framing of women's lives and livelihoods in the region also add to the need for alternative approaches to the policy process (Hall 2011; Esnard 2023). Without this questioning of the processes through which the social and political inscribe itself onto the individual, then the policy framework becomes implicit in the use of dialogic approaches that reproduces and sustains social inequalities, and a lack of access to entrepreneurial opportunities. Where this is not unique to the region, a broader push has been for a synergy between feminist insights, explorations of women's lived realities, and entrepreneurial policies and programmes (Bianco, Lombe, and Bolis 2017). Such a direction within the public policy process offers a way to rethink and reframe elements of participatory justice and transformative praxis.

Collaborative governance that is centred on dialogic public policy offers an opportunity to address this. The potential within this governance framework is for the promotion of open spaces and notions of dialogues that move beyond the hierarchies or power-laden lines of authority within the manifestation and dynamics of public-private partnerships. This type of analytical framing also takes away from the prospects of prescriptive and weak-evidence-based practices that are used to inform the public policy process within low- and middle-income countries (Dovlo, Nabyonga-Orem, Estrelli, and Mwisongo 2016). Examinations of entrepreneurial policies in the region show an alignment and reproduction of this traditional type of policy dialogue that takes for granted the lines, expressions, and manifestations of power within the process and the outcome. These appear, therefore, as an aspect of political dialogue that is symbolic of the need to direct change, but, as this paper has contended, without the requisite engagement, representation, and collaboration of critical stakeholders to remove the barriers and lines of authority that sustain the power-driven elements of dialogue. Given the lack of research and visibility of entrepreneurial policy as an area of research within the region, more is needed to understand the possibilities for social dialogue and exchange as critical drivers and tools for collaborative governance. The uniqueness, therefore, is in the ways through which an

examination of the tensions and conflicts that stem from inherent power relations can advance more authentic discussions on inherent differences, power, and authority, which exist and impact the framing of relationships that can emerge from this process. This aspect of building relations through collaboration can promote meaningful exchange, reciprocity, and the creation of learning loops that can enhance the use of dialogue within the public policy process (Innes and Booher 2010). If explored, these insights and hopes can advance the achievements within dialogue theory and practice beyond that of what obtains in the region.

## Conclusions

Public policy can sustain or disrupt the marginalised positioning of women entrepreneurs. The direction and nature of this influence, however, depends on the dialogic process, and, more specifically, the type and status of actors that are included within the design-making and implementation process. As it stands, the policy documents for the region suggest that there is much to be done to enhance the participation of women entrepreneurs within the region. Unless this is addressed, then the process only serves to institutionalise and sustain existing power structures and modes of dominance within the broader society. The centering of dialogue, with attention to questions of who and how within the process, therefore, brings into disrepute claims of representation, information sharing and decision making for key stakeholders within the consultative process of public policy.

Moving towards a more enabling process and outcome for public policy requires that we move beyond economic imperatives and strategic mandates of the entrepreneurial space and the hegemonic representations that obtains (Ahl and Nelson 2015). While the paper does not track and represent the chronological change in the relations of power that have unfolded for women in the Caribbean, it situates the importance of the political economy and the social structures within the challenges for public policy design and implementation. The use of a post-structuralist lens provides a way to unpack the policy-context-actor nexus and to open the conversations around the use of dialogue to create more inclusive policy processes. This level of openness and inclusion underscores the potential for collaborative governance when actioned within policy dialogues to disrupt existing or traditional power structures and processes that are both evident in and sustained within the public policy process.

If actioned to allow for marginalised voices and representations within the public policy process, this inclusion increases the prospects for innovative governance practices, as a fundamental aspect of creating public value, but with the possibility of building collaboration, trust, motivation, and networking in the process (Monted-

uro and Hinna 2008). The uniqueness and value of the policy dialogue thrust, therefore, is within the potential to revalue and reposition key actors, actions, and outcomes related to the policy dialogue process. While this element of inclusion may not automatically address existing power structures, it represents a more progressive dialogical process, with the potential to increase meaningful engagement of actors. This move towards a dialogic public policy process offers an important way to ensure more inclusive, collaborative, and participative practices with the potential for more effective and impactful policies to support women entrepreneurs within the Caribbean.

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