



INTERNATIONAL
FOOD POLICY
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

IFPRI Discussion Paper 02035

July 2021

Exploring Women's Empowerment Using a Mixed Methods Approach

Cheryl Doss

Deborah Rubin

Poverty, Health, and Nutrition Division

INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), a CGIAR Research Center established in 1975, provides research-based policy solutions to sustainably reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition. IFPRI's strategic research aims to foster a climate-resilient and sustainable food supply; promote healthy diets and nutrition for all; build inclusive and efficient markets, trade systems, and food industries; transform agricultural and rural economies; and strengthen institutions and governance. Gender is integrated in all the Institute's work. Partnerships, communications, capacity strengthening, and data and knowledge management are essential components to translate IFPRI's research from action to impact. The Institute's regional and country programs play a critical role in responding to demand for food policy research and in delivering holistic support for country-led development. IFPRI collaborates with partners around the world.

AUTHORS

Cheryl Doss (cheryl.doss@qeh.ox.ac.uk) is a Senior Departmental Lecturer in Development Economics and Associate Professor in the Department of International Development of the University of Oxford, United Kingdom.

Deborah Rubin (drubin@culturalpractice.com) is the Co-Director of Cultural Practice, LLC, Bethesda, MD, USA.

Notices

¹ IFPRI Discussion Papers contain preliminary material and research results and are circulated in order to stimulate discussion and critical comment. They have not been subject to a formal external review via IFPRI's Publications Review Committee. Any opinions stated herein are those of the author(s) and are not necessarily representative of or endorsed by IFPRI.

² The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on the map(s) herein do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) or its partners and contributors.

³ Copyright remains with the authors. The authors are free to proceed, without further IFPRI permission, to publish this paper, or any revised version of it, in outlets such as journals, books, and other publications.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ACRONYMS	v
1. Introduction	1
2. Conceptualizing Empowerment	5
3. Methods: An Extended Conversation	9
4. Using Mixed Methods to Understand Empowerment	13
5. What have We Learned about Women's Empowerment?	20
Decision-making	20
Asset ownership	22
Time Use	24
6. What have We Learned about Doing Research on Women's Empowerment?	26
7. Conclusions and Next Steps	31
REFERENCES	34

ABSTRACT

Interest in the meaning and measurement of women's empowerment has become a stated goal of many programs in international development. This paper explores a collaborative process of studying women's empowerment in agricultural research for development using both quantitative and qualitative methods. It draws on three bodies of research around empowerment, growing interest in qualitative methods, and measurement research, especially the conceptualization and adaptations of the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index. Employing mixed methods over more than a decade of cooperation among researchers from the Global South and the Global North has challenged the methods and findings of each approach. The work has led to new insights about gender differences in what empowerment means to women and to men, the importance of context, interrelationships among dimensions of empowerment, and the need for greater precision in terms and measures, particularly around decision-making, asset ownership, and time use. Such collaborative research benefits from a long timeframe to build trust and shared understandings across disciplines. The paper concludes with suggestions for the next phase of research.

Keywords: women's empowerment, mixed methods, collaborative research, WEAI

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We acknowledge support from the Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project, Phase 2, led by IFPRI, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation [Grant number: INV-008977], the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) [Grant number: EEM-G-00-04-00013-00], and CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH). We would also like to thank IFPRI researchers Hazel Malapit, Ruth Meinzen-Dick, and Agnes Quisumbing, the Principal Investigators of the project, as well as Jessica Heckert, both for their excellent project leadership and for reviewing the draft and providing insightful comments that improved both its organization and content.

A second thanks to all of those in the conversations that we describe in the paper from the Gender Asset Gap Project, GAAP, and GAAP2 as well as other projects that we have been involved in. This paper could not have been imagined, much less completed, without the enthusiasm of the researchers to challenge the concepts and methods in use to investigate women's empowerment.

ACRONYMS

ATVET4 Women	Agriculture Technical Vocational Education Training for Women
AUDA	African Union Development Agency
A-WEAI	Abbreviated WEAI
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CFPR-TUP	Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction—Targeting the Ultra Poor
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
GAAP	Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project
GAAP2	Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project, Phase 2
OPHI	Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
Pro-WEAI	Project Level WEAI
RCTs	Randomized Controlled Trials
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
WEAI	Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index
WEAI4VC	WEAI for Value Chains (renamed as pro-WEAI+MI, pro-WEAI for Market Inclusion)

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores a process of learning about both women’s empowerment and how to study women’s empowerment based on 15 years of sustained conversations on these issues over numerous projects¹ with colleagues worldwide. This collaboration initially emerged from a recognition that although some of the earliest and most in-depth work on “women in development” approaches focused on agriculture, providing needed evidence of women’s engagement in agricultural production, processing, and marketing, women’s agricultural work was not well represented in studies exploring women’s empowerment.

Empowering women has become a key goal in many development programs and policies. Given the significant role of agriculture as a driver of economic growth, as interest in empowerment grew, so did the need to understand whether and in what ways agricultural development interventions nurtured or inhibited women’s empowerment. In response, several approaches are emerging to monitor the impacts of these programs on women’s empowerment. There is however great variation among scholars and practitioners in both the definitions of empowerment, as well as the tools employed to monitor or measure it. The Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) and its adaptations (Alkire et al. 2013; Malapit et al. 2014; Malapit et al. 2019) has offered a different way both to conceptualize and to measure empowerment in agricultural households, with the complementary use of quantitative and qualitative methods (hereafter “mixed methods”) as a defining feature of the WEAI approach.

Two themes intersect in this paper, both of which speak to strengthening studies of empowerment. The first theme explores what we learn about empowerment by using mixed methods; the second theme investigates what is learned by extending studies of empowerment to women engaged in agricultural livelihoods.

¹ These projects include two phases of the Gender Agriculture, and Assets Project (GAAP 1 and 2), the development of the original Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) project and its family of adaptations, including the Abbreviated WEAI (A-WEAI) and project-level WEAI (pro-WEAI), as well as the pro-WEAI for Market Inclusion (previously called the WEAI for Value Chains (WEAI4VC)). Insights are also based on the African Union Development Agency (AUDA) program, “Agriculture Technical Vocational Education Training for Women (ATVET4Women).

To address these themes, we engage with three bodies of literature. The first is scholarly literature on the definition of empowerment, starting with that of Kabeer (1999) and later refinements of her conceptualization. While there is a long history of empowerment in the social sciences that predates Kabeer,² her work has become a baseline for the way that women's empowerment has been discussed in much of the development literature. The second focus is the literature reflecting the growing interest in the use of qualitative research in both international development work and in evaluation methods. The third body of work is measurement research, notably the conceptualization and development of the WEAI and its adaptations.

The historical record shows that scholars and practitioners from anthropology, political science, sociology, and economics have employed a robust set of methods drawing not only from quantitative but also qualitative approaches, with the emphasis changing over time and shifting according to the subject. The earliest work on women in agriculture and intrahousehold resource allocation were both heavily informed by anthropological research (e.g., Boserup 1970; Quisumbing and McClafferty 2006; Quisumbing 2003). Notwithstanding, applied research on international development, often led by economists, has been heavily oriented towards quantitative methods. Over the past decade, increasing attention to and funding for evaluation has supported the emergence of random controlled trials (RCTs) as the “gold standard,” and privileging of quantitative, and specifically, statistical approaches as the most rigorous.

Among those studying empowerment, there has sometimes been tension between those who are trying to measure empowerment using quantitative measures and those who use qualitative approaches to understand empowerment.³ In contrast, we begin from a position that a mixed methods approach is a way

² Power has been a critical focus of research since the mid-twentieth century. Max Weber's distinctions between power, authority, and influence from the 1940s were taken up by Rosaldo and Lamphere's edited volume *Woman, Culture, and Society*, a classic feminist anthropology text that questioned long held assumptions around the biological rootedness of women's roles in society. The collection drew on ethnographic data to argue the now taken-for-granted recognition that, even in societies where men have authority over women, “women themselves are far from helpless, and whether or not their influence is acknowledged, they exert important pressure on the social life of the group” (1974: 21). That early work was followed by many feminist, post-modern, and other scholars too numerous to count that explored compliance and discourse models of gender and power (See, e.g., Yanagisako and Delaney 1995; Cheater 1999; Rowlands 1995, 1997). Although they did not regularly use the terms of agency or empowerment, their discussions importantly influenced the study of empowerment then taken up and refined by Kabeer and others (e.g., Alsop and Heinshohn 2005).

³ The topic of comparability of various qualitative approaches across contexts, for example, has repeatedly surfaced in anthropology and is well-documented in Gingrich and Fox (2002).

of thinking as well as a way of doing. As Meinen-Dick et al. explain, “Standardized measures often fail to capture aspects of empowerment that are important in particular contexts, but measures based only on local definitions are unlikely to be comparable, limiting the accumulation of comparative evidence on processes that contribute to, or constrain, empowerment” (2019: 2). Our recent work provides insights into how using qualitative and quantitative methods together can help us understand and measure women’s empowerment in ways that are both internationally comparable and locally relevant.

We approach “mixed methods” not simply as employing a specific set of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis tools. Instead, it is defined as encompassing a set of *assumptions* about how we acquire knowledge, a set of “*strategic approaches*” to data collection, as well as set of specific *techniques* for data collection and analysis (Bernard 1994: 168)

This paper draws on conversations that we have had among our colleagues during more than a decade of collaborative work. The conversations include many people, working with quantitative and qualitative approaches, focusing on strengthening theory and empirical data. We refer to this broad group of people as our team, although it has fairly loose boundaries and has changed over time. We reflect on what we have learned about women’s empowerment and on the processes of collaborative research on this challenging but important topic. Using varied approaches to study empowerment has pointed to the value in both clarifying measurement and understanding of the pathways towards women’s empowerment, and that different methods help to achieve both aims.

Much of the work of this collaborative team has focused on women’s empowerment within agriculture. Although the percentage of economically active women who work in agriculture has dropped over the past 30 years, from a global average of 42.9% in 1991 to 25.4% in 2020, in many countries it remains the primary occupation for women, especially those who are poor and living in rural areas. Women are more likely than men to work in agriculture, and more likely to do so as informal workers, although the patterns differ across regions (International Labor Organization 2019). We draw on work that goes beyond this scope as relevant, but our primary interest has been on understanding women living and working in rural settings where they are primarily engaged in agriculture.

We begin with a discussion of empowerment and how it has been conceptualized. We then draw on our many conversations and collaborations on projects that use mixed methods, particularly the Gender, Assets, and Agriculture Project (GAAP) and the development of the WEAI. In Section 4, we discuss why mixed methods are necessary to understand women's empowerment. In Section 5, we identify some key findings that have emerged from our use of mixed methods, particularly on asset ownership, decision-making, and time use. This ongoing work has surfaced new issues about conceptualizing and understanding women's empowerment, discussed in Section 6. We conclude with a discussion of methods and what this work has taught us about doing research on women's empowerment.

2. CONCEPTUALIZING EMPOWERMENT

Most discussions on empowerment, including this one, return to Kabeer (1999) who defines empowerment as expanding people's ability to make strategic life choices, particularly in contexts in which this ability had been denied to them. In Kabeer's definition, the ability to exercise choice encompasses three dimensions: resources (defined to include not only access but also future claims to material, human, and social resources), agency (including processes of decision-making, negotiation, and even deception and manipulation), and achievements (well-being outcomes). Both the focus on strategic decision-making and the three dimensions that enable and sustain empowerment have become common in most conceptualizations and efforts to measure empowerment.

Since Kabeer's first formulation, other authors have added dimensions. These give attention to groups, institutions, and the enabling environment, including how the institutional environment supports people's ability to act (Alkire 2008; Ibrahim & Alkire 2007; Quisumbing, Rubin, and Sproule 2016) and the ability of people to hold these institutions accountable (Narayan 2005). On this last point, Narayan identifies four elements of empowerment: access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability, and local organizational capacity. This conceptualization makes a distinction between an initial individual awareness of empowerment and the conditions needed (and taken) to achieve empowerment, such as supportive policies or legal rights.

Deconstructing different components of agency (Rowlands 1995, 1997) by identifying different types of power in social relationships is another useful refinement in empowerment research (Malapit et al. 2019; Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019). Rowlands identifies four types of agency: the ability to enact personal goals ("power to"); the capacity to work together with others to achieve shared interests and goals ("power with"), the ability to internalize self-respect, self-efficacy, and to become aware of one's rights ("power within") and controlling power ("power over"). Based on our fieldwork, we do not consider "power over," as a component of empowerment (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019).

One recent direction in development practice is the narrowing of empowerment to focus on women's economic empowerment. Golla et al. (2011) state that a "woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions." Becoming economically empowered also draws on social capabilities outside of the market system. The definition currently offered by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation makes this dynamic intersection clear:

We define women's economic empowerment as the transformative process by which women and girls go from having limited power, voice, and choice at home and in the economy to having the skills, resources, and opportunities needed to access and compete equitably in markets and the agency to control and benefit from economic gains.⁴

Attention to women's economic empowerment has largely focused on women as wage workers and entrepreneurs. While much of this literature previously ignored women's involvement in agriculture, investigations into women in agribusiness, as entrepreneurs, has been an entry point for consideration of women's economic empowerment in agriculture, and is an increasingly supported by donors.

Discussions of empowerment and economic empowerment raise the question of whether agriculture provides unique opportunities for strengthening the processes of empowerment. For example, to understand women's empowerment in rural households requires looking at more than economic dimensions. Even a focus on economic empowerment requires understanding of the quality of intrahousehold relationships and potential threats (such as intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic violence) and personal satisfaction with one's work. A narrower view of economic empowerment that measures only engagement with the market misses these key dimensions.

A parallel line of inquiry that has emerged as an important dimension of economic empowerment involves choice. Entrepreneurship for women does not automatically lead to empowerment. Many women in developing countries begin a business from necessity rather than choice, because other options, including

⁴ <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/equal-is-greater/> [Accessed 4/5/2021]

wage employment, are neither available nor feasible, and they are seeking income, however small, to supplement home-based agricultural production. It is important to distinguish these microbusinesses from larger enterprises that are registered, have employees, and are seeking to expand. These two streams will have different potential for income generation and empowerment (Fintrac and Cultural Practice 2018; Revenga and Dooley 2020).

Conceptual clarity around the components of empowerment improves both the precision of what is measured as well as the quality of our understanding. If intentional and deliberate (Gates 2014) both measurement and understanding of empowerment can strengthen the benefits of agricultural programming for women, their households, and their communities. Agricultural production and much initial processing work are embedded within household farming practices and shaped by local gender norms. Creating opportunities for women to empower themselves in these circumstances will impact, whether positively or negatively, the relationships between men and women in the household—perhaps more than that associated with taking a job outside the home—because it typically involves a chance to obtain new assets, such as livestock, to reallocate existing household or community resources, or shift patterns of decision-making over them (Quisumbing et al. 2013). This close relationship between the work of agriculture and gender roles makes a mixed methods approach particularly valuable.

As analysis from field research shows below, however, that women and men around the world do not necessarily have the same understanding of empowerment. As Meinzen-Dick et al. (2019) point out, respondents in the communities studied have a broad but nuanced understanding of empowerment. They have, for example, clearly rejected “power over” as a characteristic of empowerment. Their views also reflect an understanding, not only of women’s empowerment in agriculture, such as being able to make cropping decisions or to sell livestock, but also empowerment through agriculture, such as when control over income or assets affords them the ability to reach other achievements associated with empowerment: caring for their families, meeting religious obligations, or becoming a role model in their communities. Using both quantitative and qualitative tools links the perspectives on the concepts of empowerment of the

observer or analyst (etic) and the local perceptions of the group members being studied (emic) that together provide a more comprehensive view of changes resulting from development interventions.

3. METHODS: AN EXTENDED CONVERSATION

This paper draws heavily on our experiences of collaborating over fifteen years on several large projects. The collaborations involved dozens of people and activities, and many, many conversations, both formal and informal, over the years. Throughout this time, we wrestled with how to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analyses to understand women's empowerment. We agreed and disagreed on important issues. The two of us, an economist and an anthropologist, were at the center of some of the conversations and on the margins of others, but we found ourselves coming back again and again to questions about appropriate methods.

The Gender, Assets, and Agriculture Project (GAAP)⁵ was launched in 2010 to study the ways in which agricultural development programs affect men's and women's access to and control over a range of assets. The premise was that women's ownership and control over assets was empowering and could have long term impacts on the well-being of women and their families. In its first phase, eight agricultural development programs from South Asia and Africa each analyzed how men's and women's ownership and control over assets changed over the life of their project. The projects ranged from being gender blind, to gender sensitive and gender transformative. While the intent was to include both qualitative and quantitative components, in practice there was much less emphasis on the qualitative work.

GAAP drew on earlier work that explored how to measure asset ownership at the individual level in large-sample household surveys. A workshop on "Measuring Women's Assets" in 2007,⁶ led to the formation of the Gender Asset Gap Project, which was designed to demonstrate the importance and feasibility of collecting sex-disaggregated data on asset ownership. While ownership and control over assets is only one component of empowerment, at the time, there was almost no data that disaggregated men's

⁵ GAAP was implemented by the International Food Policy Research Institute and the International Livestock Research Institute with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. <http://gaap.ifpri.info/about-gaap/>

⁶ See Doss, Grown, and Deere (2008). The Gender Asset Gap project began with almost a year of qualitative data gathering in three countries, before developing the survey instrument. While this project did not focus directly on empowerment, it raised questions about the importance of women's asset ownership and issues of women's empowerment were often part of the discussion, if not the published papers. Some of the experience of this project also feeds into these discussions on empowerment. <https://sites.google.com/view/genderassetgap/home>

and women's asset ownership. Most asset data was collected at the household level in large-sample surveys. GAAP also drew on experiences from a USAID funded project, Pathways For Ensuring Access to Assets: Land Tenure Reform and Beyond,⁷ that analyzed issues of women's land tenure security.

Over the same period, many of the researchers involved in GAAP were developing the WEAI through a collaborative effort of IFPRI, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), and USAID (Alkire et al. 2013). The index was designed for population-based surveys to monitor the impact of broad-based agricultural development programs, particularly those undertaken through the USAID Feed the Future Initiative. While some qualitative work informed the development of the index, the index itself is primarily a quantitative tool for use in large surveys.

These two projects intersected in the second phase of the GAAP project (GAAP2), which focused on developing a WEAI measure that projects could use for impact evaluation. This second phase incorporated development projects focused on livestock and/or cropping interventions designed to improve nutrition, increase income, or both. Researchers, project implementers, and project monitoring, evaluation, and learning staff involved in these projects came together to develop and test the project-level WEAI or "pro-WEAI" measure in the context of their projects. The participation of those who would be using the index was fundamental to process of developing it. In 2021, this project is still active, with baseline and endline data collection mostly completed, and validation of the index ongoing. Drawing on lessons from the initial GAAP, the second phase sought to find better ways to incorporate qualitative analyses into our understandings of women's empowerment.

All of these projects build on both qualitative and quantitative data to further our understanding of empowerment and its relevance in development program settings. For empowerment to be a common goal in project planning and implementation, we need a shared understanding of what it is and how it can be measured, as well as the processes that support it. Yet, we realize that understandings of empowerment are very context specific.

⁷ See <http://crsps.net/resource/pathways-for-ensuring-access-to-assets-land-tenure-reform-and-beyond/>

In the initial WEAI, the choice of domains of empowerment was determined by the donor, USAID. The domains are (1) decisions about agricultural production, (2) access to and decision-making power about productive resources, (3) control of use of income, (4) leadership in the community, and (5) time allocation. These domains were chosen because they could be directly influenced by USAID programming. While these domains were identified by drawing on the literature about women's empowerment, they did not link directly either to the theory of empowerment or to variations in concepts of empowerment in different geographies. Theories of women's empowerment are more clearly articulated in the pro-WEAI, which employs "generative notions of empowerment, including power within, power to, and power with" (Malapit et al. 2019: 676).

The quantitative data collection efforts consisted primarily of surveys in which both a man and a woman were interviewed separately in each household. The surveys employed some innovative techniques, including short vignettes to address issues of autonomy. The qualitative data was collected primarily through focus groups and key informant interviews.

Throughout the development of the pro-WEAI, our team of researchers took advantage to meet often in both formal workshops and more informal settings, including shared visits to field sites. We discussed what we were learning in each iteration, constantly questioning our assumptions and interrogating our results, and these discussions shaped new questions and the next steps of the research.

Although the initial WEAI indicators were developed under severe time pressure to enable USAID to use them to evaluate their Feed the Future projects, there has been scope to revise them in response to feedback from the users. Not only was a shorter, abbreviated, version created, the A-WEAI, but also any components that were identified as problematic have been taken back to the field for revision and validation across contexts.

The qualitative research in GAAP2 was designed to gain a better understanding of the conditions of poverty and women's disempowerment and what they meant for project participants, to validate the domains and indicators for pro-WEAI, and to understand the linkages between project interventions and women's empowerment outcomes.

Building on lessons learned from GAAP, the qualitative team developed a set of standardized but flexible protocols that could be used and adapted by the participating projects and refined, based on both their topics of interest and available resources. Developing the protocols was a collaborative effort seeking to guide the collection of qualitative information to supplement and help to interpret the quantitative surveys while remaining sufficiently flexible to meet the specific needs and questions of each project. We chose to focus on exploring local understandings of empowerment through the use of life histories, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019).⁸

The qualitative findings have also helped to validate the quantitative survey and the construction of the WEAI and pro-WEAI. The qualitative studies helped to identify the topics to be included in the questionnaires and contributed to the use of scenarios and vignettes. Cognitive interviewing ensured that respondents understood the question being asked, and often identified ways to make them easier to answer (Hannan et al. 2019; Malapit et al. 2017). Results from the qualitative studies also informed the process of setting the thresholds of empowerment and disempowerment for the index.

Thus, a variety of both qualitative and quantitative methods were modified and implemented over a number of years, with frequent conversations among those involved about the lessons learned and how to move forward.

⁸ Because qualitative data had been used to validate the original indicators of the WEAI, the qualitative data collection for pro-WEAI focused on the proposed new indicators, including intra-household dynamics, mobility, production decision-making, and autonomy in control of income. Some projects also looked into decision-making on health and nutrition. The set of qualitative protocols are publicly available at <http://weai.ifpri.info/files/2018/04/GAAP2-Qualitative-Protocols-no-comments-.pdf>.

4. USING MIXED METHODS TO UNDERSTAND EMPOWERMENT

An underlying assumption in our team's approach to using mixed methods to understand empowerment starts from the position that empowerment is both a process as well as an objective to be achieved. The complexity in both the concept of empowerment and its measurement makes it a particularly good case for employing multiple forms of investigation and analysis to be able to build a more holistic view of the topic, one that is informed by emic views of local participants as well as etic views of research scientists. We add to this dichotomous "emic or etic" view the acknowledgement of the value of data and analysis informed by local experts, the boundary crossing scholars and practitioners from those countries who are both participants in and experts about the contexts in which they live and/or work.

When quantitative and qualitative data are both valued, what we have called "method equality," a mixed methods approach using surveys, interviews, focus groups, and other techniques enhances the results obtained. We are not simply using one approach to support the other but recognize the inherent value of each. Mixed methods can be particularly useful in gender research on agriculture because agricultural activities are embedded in households and are perceived by the participants as synonymous or "naturally" connected to gender roles and gender relationships. Naturalization is the social process of making beliefs about a subject appear to be "natural, inevitable, and even god-given" (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995, 1). It reflects an emic view of the world. The converse of naturalization is to problematize a topic, a belief, or a practice, exposing it to investigation and analysis, reflected in etic analysis. Using these three sources of information—the "inside," "outside," and "boundary" respondents just mentioned—and employing mixed methods is important in researching gendered subjects because it offers a way to interrogate peoples' own understandings of gender relations, "among the most fundamental types of "taken for granted" knowledge" (Rubin 2016: 4).

BOX1: CONTRIBUTIONS OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE METHODS

GOOD QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH	GOOD QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explains phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods (especially statistics) • Identifies patterns of and/or behaviors in populations of interest; large sample size can provide more representative results • Econometric methods combined with theory allow testing of different scenarios to attribute causality and estimate impacts if data is of high quality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explores the “why” and the meaning of behaviors and belief • Probes diversions between beliefs and actual practices • Offers flexibility to follow emerging lines of inquiry or to clarify contradictions • Captures informants’ views in their own words, clarifying how they understand social categories • Expose what people may think is natural as actually being a social practice, opening it up for discussion and creating the potential for change.

Source: Aliaga and Gunderson (2006); Bernard (2006); Quisumbing, A. et al. (2014); Rubin (2016).

Effective quantitative research methods provide a means to see the broad patterns across relatively large groups of people. Having a quantitative measure of empowerment, such as one of the WEAI indices, may allow us to describe the empowerment levels of representative samples of people and compare across contexts and across time. We can understand the relationships between different dimensions of empowerment and characteristics of individuals, their households, and their community. Econometric analyses are one way to demonstrate causal relationships, between, for example, a program intervention and women’s empowerment.

Effective qualitative research methods “can expose what people may think is natural as actually being a social practice, opening it up for discussion and creating the potential for change” (Rubin 2016:4). In interviews, individuals’ stereotypical responses can be probed to reveal a more nuanced understanding of the respondent’s status, self-esteem, vulnerability, or, of course, empowerment.

The indices created from WEAI survey data provide comparable measures of empowerment. The comparisons may be across countries, across projects, or over time. The categories and responses are for the most part preset, however, and may miss factors that impinge on outcomes of interest. The qualitative studies help to reveal the messiness of the local differences in the meaning of empowerment, as men and women in different socio-economic contexts may have different strategic priorities than those measured in the survey. Think of it this way: a thermometer measures temperature, defined as the average kinetic energy

of the particles in an object that generates heat. This definition does not change depending upon where the thermometer is used. The temperature in a room, for example, will be the same regardless of the characteristics of the person in it. The temperature does not vary based on the person's sex, ethnicity, age, or level of activity. What does vary is a person's subjective experience of whether that temperature is hot or cold. What feels hot to one person may feel cool to another, or vice versa. And for some people, their subjective response to the temperature in their environment may be a response to the humidity, or their recent activity, rather than the simple indicator of temperature alone.

The qualitative protocols used thus far in our research have privileged some methods over others: key informant interviews, seasonality mapping, and focus group discussions. These choices were often a result of time and funding constraints, but studies of empowerment might also benefit from more frequent use of techniques such as participant observation. PhotoVoice, allowing local participants to photograph their own priorities and to reach policymakers (Wang and Burris 1997), or Most Significant Change, which elicits views from both beneficiaries and project staff about key intervention benefits or problems (Davies and Dart 2005) may be other ways to ensure that local voices are reflected.

Translating the term empowerment is a recurring challenge. Team members have tried to avoid using the direct, local translation of the word "empowerment" as that is often closely aligned with the goals of groups carrying out development activities (Meinzen-Dick et al 2019: 13). Instead, the survey and interview questions translate Kabeer's definition directly, asking about people's ability to make strategic decisions and to act on them.

One additional challenge is that in some contexts respondents did not view making independent decisions, without the involvement of other household members, as desirable. Instead, they valued making decisions jointly within the context of their household. Yet, the evidence also shows that what is reported as joint decision-making does not necessarily mean that women have equal voice. Thus, our understandings of empowerment will differ depending on whether we define making strategic decisions and acting on them as something that can only be done individually or if acting collectively within the household may also be seen as empowerment.

We have also learned to question the methods when the quantitative and qualitative results differ or contradict each other. Sometimes the qualitative work has helped to clarify what at first seemed unusual quantitative results; at other times, the quantitative results pointed to issues in the qualitative variables or samples. Both the surveys and the interview protocols have benefited from the mutual probing.

Using mixed methods has resulted in insights that could not be obtained from using the methods separately. First, Kabeer's definition of empowerment emphasizes that empowerment is a process involving change. Thus, we cannot understand empowerment by simply looking at a snapshot. The WEAI measures are an index calculated at one point in time and use thresholds to identify whether or not the person is empowered. By comparing a WEAI measure over time, it is possible to identify changes, but that is still comparing two moments in time, rather clarifying the process through which the changes occurred. The qualitative work can help to identify these processes. The quantitative indicators give us some benchmarks and standards to link these processes and to be able to compare across contexts.

One of the projects involved in the first GAAP phase was BRAC's "Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction—Targeting the Ultra Poor" (CFPR-TUP) program in Bangladesh (Roy et al. 2015). It was a randomized intervention that provided training and assets, usually livestock, to rural women in "ultra poor" households. The program significantly increased household level asset ownership and the women retained control over the transferred livestock, which are usually considered men's assets. However, women's asset ownership relative to men's decreased, since the assets acquired with increased incomes were considered men's assets. The program also shifted women's work from outside to inside the home, reduced women's mobility, and significantly decreased women's involvement in a range of household decisions. This suggests, based on the standard quantitative measures, women may have been disempowered by the project. The qualitative findings, however, were more positive. The women beneficiaries reported that they gained self-confidence and satisfaction in contributing to the household. In addition, because their paid work had been demeaning and low status, one source of disempowerment was removed. Thus, the qualitative findings suggest that the program had mixed results on women's

empowerment. It has also challenged us to reconceptualise the extent to which employment and the income it generates are necessarily seen as empowering.

The second set of insights comes from having both indicators to analyze patterns across time and space from the quantitative data and the local nuance and meaning from the qualitative. This provides insights into whether the standard measurements of empowerment match with the local understandings. For example, qualitative respondents interviewed in another Bangladesh project provided a rich and heterogeneous view of men's and women's empowerment that did not always align with the quantitative categories (Rubin et al. 2018). Both men and women stressed that respect, admiration, and religiosity were more important than the ability to make strategic decisions and act on them. Sometimes they appeared uncomfortable with the idea that men and women would take independent decisions about either agricultural work or care work. Others said that being respected, admired, or seen as religious could enhance their ability to take strategic decisions and act on them. These local or emic concepts of empowerment can inform the design of development interventions oriented towards strengthening the dimensions of empowerment measured in the quantitative survey. The sensitivity about women's participation in agricultural field work, for example, suggests that efforts encouraging women to engage in other nodes of the value chain, such as processing, might be more acceptable (Rubin et al. 2018).

The country studies in GAAP2 illustrate that what women consider to be strategic decisions varies by context, and that, for most women, the ability to act on those decisions also depends on a supportive institutional environment, not only individual action. This suggests that the indicators in the WEAI may not necessarily be capturing the most salient components of empowerment for these women, even though from an external perspective they measure the variables that enable successful participation in and benefits that derive from agricultural work. Having both sources of data offers researchers and practitioners the integrated picture they need to evaluate whether the strategies used to engage women in agricultural interventions will also resonate with—and be successfully adopted by—members of the targeted community.

Yet, another interpretation of these findings is also possible. When the quantitative results suggest disparities that are not raised in the qualitative interviews, it may be that the existing patterns are so embedded in local social norms and customs that no one perceives them as issues. Research conducted in many countries shows “there is strong belief, among both women and men, that violence is acceptable, and even necessary, when used by men to discipline women for not delivering on their perceived responsibilities or when their behavior transgresses social norms” (Oxfam n.d.). Similarly, women may not raise the issue that they do not own land, because women owning their own land is outside the range of their reality. Men and women, youth and adult, may not see how their individual views are conditioned by their engagement in their socio-cultural environment. Experience of empowerment differs depending on whether you live in a disempowered household/community as well as your position in the household. The individual’s perspective and their cultural context work together to permit (or not) the creation of different visions for the future, sometimes described as the “capacity to aspire” (Appadurai 2004).

Our investigations into empowerment have shown that the concept of empowerment is both situationally complicated and that it varies over time and space. Both the quantitative and qualitative studies show that levels of empowerment and ideas about empowerment vary across countries and change across generations. There are often different viewpoints within households. In Nepal mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in the same households performed similar numbers of hours of domestic and agricultural work, but their subjective experience of empowerment differed according to their social positions. The daughters-in-law expressed a greater sense of disempowerment than the mothers-in-law, linked to their relative lack of autonomy over their time, since their mothers-in-law directed their tasks and how long they should take (Doss, Meinzen-Dick, Pereira, and Pradhan 2020; Pradhan, Meinzen-Dick, and Theis 2019).

Empowerment was also closely associated with having sufficient assets to accomplish desired goals ranging from obtaining the resources needed to obtain land, start or run a business, or make investments in jewelry or houses. But overwhelmingly, women spoke of empowerment as being able to take care of their families. Interestingly, however, the absolute level of income was not a clear indicator of empowerment: those with higher incomes did not always self-report feeling more empowered. Their subjective experience

of empowerment was linked to not only having income, but also to having control over their time, their work, and their mobility. This disconnect between income, control over time, and empowerment helps to explain why women entrepreneurs do not consistently report feeling empowered (Quisumbing et al. 2016) and should caution against assuming that entrepreneurship equals empowerment.

These complex and interrelated dimensions of empowerment suggest that the process of empowerment is not a linear one. Whereas much of development work assumes that goals can be achieved by supplying something that is assumed to be missing, such as credit, inputs, knowledge, supporting women's empowerment is not so straightforward. The heterogeneity and inequalities among women from different communities and means that what empowers some may disempower others when offered the same services or support. In Kyrgyzstan, a project specifically designed with a women's empowerment objective resulted in disempowering some of the targeted beneficiaries when it required that they attend numerous group meetings and take out loans. Women who lived farther away from the meeting place or who did not have personal or family resources to manage the loan repayments ended up poorer than they had been before the project, while the women living closer to the village and who were initially better off were more successful (Kim et al. 2018).

Even among women who report positive benefits from their engagement with development projects find themselves making trade-offs. While the resources gained from their participation gives them a sense of empowerment by caring for one's family and oneself, it also requires an investment of time in one's work that takes time away from the family one is seeking to sustain (Johnson et al. 2015).

5. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT?

While much has been learned about women's empowerment by using either qualitative or quantitative data, the interface of the two approaches has provided some additional insights. Here we highlight what we learned about three dimensions of women's empowerment, decision-making, asset ownership, and time use.

Decision-making

The ability to make strategic decisions is the definition of empowerment. Yet, what it looks like in practice is less clear. Much of the literature on empowerment asks women whether or not they make decisions across a range of domains, such as agricultural production and the use of the output, household expenditure, or whether to seek health care.⁹

Much of the early work on women's decision-making assumed that women who make decisions independently are more empowered than those who make them jointly with their spouse or who do not make them.¹⁰ Yet, qualitative evidence suggests that joint decision-making may also be empowering for women. Women do not necessarily want to make all decisions themselves. Women are often concerned about making the decisions independently and then being held responsible if something goes wrong. In some cases, they would rather make the decisions jointly with their spouse and share the responsibility (Bryan and Garner 2020). When men migrate and women remain to manage the farm, there are mixed impacts on women's empowerment. It may be empowering for women to be able to make decisions, yet if they are left with additional responsibilities and insufficient resources it may have a disempowering effect. Women do frequently say that they want to have a voice in decision-making within the household. And many of the projects that involved training women, such as on livestock management, have resulted in women being more engaged in decision-making regarding the livestock, and they are pleased to have their

⁹ Much of the literature relies on analysis of the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) data, which has a limited set of decision-making questions.

¹⁰ See Donald et al. 2020 for a review of this literature.

voice heard (Johnson et al. 2013). Thus, we need a better understanding of which decisions women would like to make, whether they would prefer to make them independently or jointly, and how this varies across contexts.

Husbands and wives often provide different answers when asked who makes the decisions, whether in a structured survey interview or a more open-ended format. While this may be, in part, because they are providing the answers that they think are expected, it may also be a fundamental difference in their understanding of how decisions are made or of asymmetric information about which decisions are made (Ambler et al. 2020). The qualitative evidence suggests that women often have some influence on household decisions, including agricultural production decisions, even when their husband claims that he makes the decision independently. As social norms change and it becomes more acceptable for women to have some visible influence, they may claim joint decision-making even when they play a very limited role (Acosta et al 2020). Women whose husbands made a decision without discussing it with them, may report a process of joint decision-making if their husband discusses it with them afterwards, even if he still makes the decision independently.

Finally, the patterns may vary across decisions. Women are more likely to make instrumental decisions and involve daily activities than to make larger strategic decisions for the household. The WEAI indicators consider decision-making in the agricultural sector, but many of the strategic decisions for women may be outside of this sphere. Researchers rarely ask women about how the major strategic decisions that affect their lives are made, such as when and who to marry, where to live, or whether to engage in wage employment. Life histories can identify how these larger strategic decisions were made.

The qualitative evidence on decision-making on agricultural production also indicated that people often feel that there is no decision to be made about what to grow or how to grow it. They are following the patterns that have been done on their farm and in the community. They may grow rice because it is a rice growing area; it is not seen as a choice. Insisting in a quantitative survey that they respond regarding who decides may result in data that is not useful.

Thus, the mixed methods approaches have identified the many challenges in identifying whether women are able to make strategic decisions.

Asset ownership

Both the qualitative and quantitative research has confirmed that women's ownership of and control over assets is an important component of their empowerment. But it is not simply that having more assets means that a woman is more empowered. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods has provided key insights into the relationships between asset ownership and empowerment.

First, it is important to know which assets women see as empowering. For example, there is an assumption that all women want to own land because land is the most valuable asset in rural areas and provides a source of livelihood and security. However, while many women do want to own land, it has its disadvantages as well. It is not portable; women must remain in the community where the land is held. It cannot necessarily be turned into cash when that is what is needed. Women may prefer assets that are portable, especially if they feel that they need to leave and start over. There may also be strong social norms that limit women's interest in obtaining her own land. In some cultures when a woman seeks to own land independently, her family and community assumes that she is planning to leave her husband. The social norms against her doing so may be strong. Thus, she may prefer to own other assets.

When asked about important assets, women list things that we would not necessarily have considered. In a Ugandan focus group, women said that a decent set of clothes was an important asset, because it meant that a woman could participate in community activities and it gave her some social status.¹¹ This has important economic implications for the women, even though clothing is not usually be considered a productive asset.

Second, the understanding of what ownership involves also varies widely across contexts. Quantitative analyses that compare land ownership across contexts often note the challenges of defining

¹¹ This was noted in research conducted for the "Pathways for Ensuring Access to Assets: Land Reform and Beyond" that was funded by USAID through the Broadening Access and Strengthening Input Systems/Assets and Market Access Collaborative Research Support Project in 2011.

ownership. In many places, much of the land is not formally owned by individuals. It may be held under customary tenure with individuals holding some of the rights, such as the right to farm or improve the land. In other places, such as Ethiopia, formal ownership is held by the state, but programs of land certification are beginning to document the rights that individuals may have over it (Slavchevska et al. 2020). As a result, one issue is whether anyone formally owns the land, and then whether, if so, women have any of these claims. For purposes of cross-country comparability, many studies use the right to sell as a measure of ownership or the strongest bundle of rights possible with the country's legal framework.

For some dimensions of empowerment, the defining feature is whether women actually own the assets. For others, women are more concerned with whether they have control over the asset and can use it for productive purposes. Having secure tenure over land is the key dimension for women's empowerment in agriculture, which may or may not strictly overlap with her ownership of the parcel (Doss and Meinzen-Dick 2020).

Third, much of the literature on asset ownership assumes that women want to own assets independently, rather than jointly with their husband (Agarwal 2003).¹² It suggests sole ownership is more empowering than joint ownership. The quantitative evidence on asset ownership clearly shows that many assets across many contexts are reported as owned jointly.¹³ It is critical to understand what is meant by joint ownership and what women and men mean when they report this. The qualitative research tells us that women often report being a joint owner of the land, even if they have no legal rights to it. Thus, a survey response that a person is a joint owner may have different implications for men and for women. We cannot ignore the patterns of joint ownership nor can we assume what joint ownership means in a particular context.

Finally, the qualitative data are clear that the relationship between asset ownership and empowerment is complex. In Nepal, interviews revealed that while assets may provide a means of empowerment, women need to have some agency in order to be able to retain their assets. This is

¹² There is some work that talks about how land rights are socially embedded in the community (Jackson 2003; Meinzen-Dick and Mwangi 2009).

¹³ See Doss, Deere, Oduro, and Swaminathan 2015, and Doss et al. 2015.

particularly an issue for young women who marry and move in with their husband and his parents. Bringing assets with them to the marriage does not necessarily mean that they will retain control over them (Pradhan, Meitzen-Dick, and Theis 2019).

Property rights are more complex than ownership and are embedded in social relationships. While great strides have been made in quantitatively measuring women's asset ownership, the interpretation of the data will also require a thoughtful understanding of the local context.

Time Use

The mixed methods approach to understanding time use has provided some important insights that is changing how we think about the topic. Ongoing methodological work has explored the best ways to capture time use, particularly for women who are often simultaneously engaged in primary activities, such as working in the fields, and secondary activities, such as childcare. But some of the quantitative findings have challenged us to do additional qualitative research and rethink what it is that we are trying to measure.

For example, the quantitative measures of workload that are captured in the WEAI do not seem to be correlated with the indicators on satisfaction with the amount of leisure time. This may be because the level of satisfaction is related to social norms and to women's expectations about what an appropriate amount of leisure time would be.

Piloting of questions that asked whether time was available for new opportunities also did not seem to be capturing a dimension of women's empowerment. When women were asked whether they could do more of a particular activity if they wanted to, the responses seemed to be based on whether there was a substitute for their labor in their activities, rather than whether they had additional time available.¹⁴

Empowerment regarding workload or time use is about more than just the number of hours that women report working. In surveys in Nepal, the hours worked by mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law did not show statistically significant differences. Yet the qualitative work captures the local concept of "dukkha," or suffering, that daughters-in-law endure. The narratives are of daughters-in-law complaining

¹⁴ These findings are not part of a published paper but come out of the extended conversations about this work.

bitterly about having to work long and hard under the critical eye of their mothers-in-law. By analyzing both the qualitative and quantitative results, we have concluded that part of the issue is about agency over time, rather than simply the hours worked. The similar reports on hours worked do not capture the fact that the daughters-in-law do not choose which tasks to perform, nor that they work harder with fewer breaks (Doss et al. 2020). Without the quantitative numbers to challenge the notion that daughters-in-law are not reporting working more hours, we would not have explored these issues of time agency so fully. An exploration of the concept of time-use agency using qualitative data from Benin, Nigeria, and Malawi finds that it is a salient component of women's empowerment (Eissler et al. 2021).

Finally, there may be trade-offs between increasing empowerment across domains, particularly with time use (Quisumbing et al. 2020). For example, in Mozambique, as a result of providing improved dairy cows to households, women's workload increased substantially. The qualitative evidence, however, suggests that women felt that because they were contributing their labor, they were able to participate more in decision-making. Thus, they felt that the trade-off was worthwhile (Johnson 2015).

6. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT DOING RESEARCH ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT?

While we have learned much about women's empowerment over the course of these collaborations, we have also learned important lessons about how to do this research.

The key drivers of our success in understanding of women's empowerment have been that we have been able to have these extended conversations across methods, contexts, and time. Insights about the research process as well as the findings from one context, including those that did not make their way into published papers, have influenced the data collection and analysis in the next study. Developing teams that include both people with qualitative and those with quantitative expertise has been critical. Spending time together in the field is especially important, since those with different backgrounds and training each have different perspectives on what they see. Often, even when project teams include researchers using different methodologies, they do not work together. Instead, they each provide an independent component of the project and write separate papers. There is often criticism of the other method, rather than true collaboration across methods. By working together over many years, our relationships are built on trust and respect. These relationships have extended to new people who have recently joined the research teams. The conversations have been much richer because they include people using different methods and in different contexts.

Long term funding of the projects has also been critical. While the conversations have extended over several projects, each of the projects had relatively long term funding. This allowed for an expectation of continued interaction and allowed the trust to build. We were not simply trying to write a single paper or evaluate a single project, but we had funding that intentionally allowed us to explore the links and connections. Still, funding is often more available for quantitative research, with key components of the qualitative research, particularly the time in the field and the time for analysis, being cut or shortchanged.

In particular, it has been important to build long-term relationships between the researchers based in international organizations that have a global focus, with those based in the Global South, who often have much more in depth research experience in a particular place. Many of us have been involved in projects led by people in international organizations that relied on people based in the field sites to provide

local knowledge. These approaches reproduce power imbalances between the researchers in the Global North and the Global South. These divisions often closely match the splits between qualitative and quantitative work, with the “rigorous” quantitative work being done by those in the Global North and the deeply localized qualitative work being done by those in the Global South.

In contrast, over the course of these projects, we have had qualitative researchers based in the Global North who have insisted that the qualitative work be taken seriously and who were able to provide comparative analysis across the various qualitative studies. In addition, we have had quantitative researchers based in the Global South who have challenged the ways that we are collecting data and identifying variables because they are deeply immersed in the local context. We have frequently had people from the various projects all in the same room, sharing knowledge across contexts and challenging deeply held assumptions held by others.

Doing good qualitative research across a range of projects has been difficult. Although it was originally envisioned that each project under the initial GAAP would field a qualitative research team, there were problems of time and funding. It was not possible to follow an iterative process that started with initial formative qualitative research, then developed and conducted the survey, and finally followed up on emerging themes. In most cases, the qualitative work followed the quantitative survey. The fact that the research was embedded in ongoing projects where the local staff understood the local context only partially mitigated the limited budgets and timeframe available for the qualitative work. While in a number of countries there are now well-trained teams of enumerators who can conduct surveys with only a few days of intensive training, the same does not exist for qualitative work. A significant problem was finding qualified researchers and/or research assistants to conduct interviews or focus groups who knew when and how to follow up to capture nuance in the responses around the meaning of empowerment. They did not always accurately record the data in a form that could be analyzed by others. Sometimes interviews or focus groups were held in a local language but the written record was in another language and then translated into English, with a large loss in meaning. Although the iterative approach was not always possible when

evaluating particular interventions, there were iterations across methods throughout the broader work. The evaluations of one project in GAAP or GAAP2 shaped how we asked the questions in another context.

A short-term project focus on “results” impedes interdisciplinary and mixed methods research. Even in these projects with relatively long term funding, there is often pressure to get results out quickly. As noted above, the original WEAI was developed on a very short timeframe to evaluate USAID Feed the Future programs. Researchers are always under pressure to move to the next project, without enough time to reflect. And quantitative data collection is often prioritized by donors, rather than qualitative data collection or further analysis. Using communication software to facilitate electronic group discussions and planning for periodic gatherings to present and discuss results over the life of the project has not only solidified the strength of the targeted research, but has also created an active community of practice, working together on multiple projects with new donors and organizations, using the same mixed methods approach.

It is time-consuming to do good empirical research on empowerment. The qualitative and quantitative analyses are important, but they take time to implement well. Enumerators and research assistants often require intensive training. At times, the training must help them to unlearn some of the ways that they have done data collection and to hear the voices of the women in the households, challenging their own stereotypes as well as those of their informants so that the responses obtained truly reflect the dissonance and complexity of lived experiences.

To overcome some of these limitations, we kept looking for shortcuts. And we were able to identify a few. The A-WEAI captures key dimensions of empowerment in a shorter questionnaire than the original WEAI. We were able to identify a few sets of questions for which the answers were highly correlated with each other, even across contexts. In these cases, we could recommend that only one of the questions was needed. We have also tried to emphasize the value of good secondary research, including accounts of both qualitative and quantitative research about the project area as input into structuring the data collection tools and to cross-check our analyses. But these are very marginal short-cuts. To actually understand women’s empowerment in a local context takes time and effort or the “results” are generally not worth having.

Since we started this work, intersectionality has become central in many discussions about development research and practice. While the recognition that it is important to avoid generalizations about women, but instead to specify which women, has been part of the narrative for many years, the approach of intersectionality goes beyond that. According to Collins, “The term intersectionality references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (2015: 2). Collins goes on to note that intersectionality can refer to a field of study acknowledging the role of power relations in influence the subject under study; an analytical strategy; and as action with the explicit goal of social justice.

We also recognized, as noted above, three aspects of mixed methods: its *assumptions* about how we acquire knowledge, a set of “*strategic approaches*” to data collection, as well as set of specific *techniques* for data collection and analysis (Bernard 1994). In contrast to this three-layered approach, we have seen an increasing number of research studies that purport to use an intersectional approach that collects qualitative and quantitative data but stops short of an integrated analysis. The results from the survey and the results from focus group discussions, for example, are each presented but are not used to interrogate or support the analysis process. This parallel approach is additive rather than intersectional and does not benefit from the strength that an understanding of the “multiple jeopardies” of interactive types and levels of discrimination can reveal (King 1988: 42).

Qualitative analyses are particularly suited to helping us understand intersectionality. They can help to identify which dimensions are most relevant in a particular context and then to understand how these phenomena are constructed. An intersectional approach in analyses of empowerment would encourage us to think about how these different phenomenon shape people’s experiences of empowerment.

In a quantitative analysis, considering intersectionality would, at a minimum, mean that we included not only a variable for each of the relevant dimensions, particularly race and gender, but also interaction terms that captures something beyond simply the additive effects of the coefficients on the individual variables. But it is rare that the sample sizes are large enough to capture the intersectionality

among the wide range of relevant factors with any statistical significance.

Yet, within the development field, analyzing intersectionality has often come to mean simply that we consider the experiences of different groups of people, particularly women, separately. We might consider the impacts of a program on women in different wealth quintiles, or by race or caste. This is not an innovative approach, but simply good social science.

The study of women's empowerment is an area where an intersectional approach has the potential to provide important insights. The focus in studies of women's empowerment is already on issues of power and inequalities. The quantitative analyses of empowerment typically focus primarily on gender, with the econometric analyses simply controlling for other factors. The qualitative analyses of empowerment often focus on women's experiences, disaggregating data across different groups of women, but not necessarily analyzing how these different phenomena together create the myriad experiences of women. And many qualitative studies focus on a particular locality, where people may be homogenous across some dimensions, such as race or ethnicity. For projects to be able to increase women's empowerment, they will have to understand the relationship of different forces that keep women disempowered.

Collins' definition leaves room for but does not explicitly call out three areas that are relevant when considering a global context. When we are considering South Asia, we need to explicitly consider caste as well as ethnicity. Religion similarly is relevant in many places. Finally, marital status and relative position within the household is particularly relevant for women, especially in polygynous households. Whether a woman is married, widowed, divorced, or never married will intersect with these other phenomena and shape her experiences. Much of the work on women's empowerment focuses on married women, although there are some programs for young unmarried women. Quantitative surveys often interview the primary decision-makers within the household, typically both a man and a woman, while leaving out other women in the household, such as unmarried daughters or sisters of the so-called household head. The widowed mother of the household head may not be interviewed, even when she is still a powerful decision maker over agricultural resources or household labor. Additional work is needed to understand the empowerment of these other women within rural communities.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Using complementary quantitative and qualitative research methods illuminates spaces not seen by either approach individually. By using mixed methods across a range of projects that involve different issues, different time periods, and very different contexts, we have learned both about women's empowerment and about how to conduct research on women's empowerment.

Conversations over many years, with both qualitative and quantitative researchers based both in the Global North and the Global South, have demonstrated the importance of building strong relationships across researchers, to allow us to move beyond debates about discipline and methods, to see how the insights from one context can help shape our understanding of women's empowerment in another. As many development projects are moving to having shorter timelines, with impact evaluations having limited budgets, both in terms of time and money, we lose many opportunities to build a deeper understanding of the factors that influence women's empowerment and how these processes are perceived by the women themselves.

With a long time horizon over many projects, as questions and issues are unresolved in one development project in one context, these issues can be explicitly incorporated into the next round of study. For some of these issues, there has not been a final resolution. We have learned about the importance of women's agency over her own time but have not yet found an ideal way to measure this in quantitative surveys. Time use surveys that measure the amount of time that people are spending in various activities is important but may miss key elements of how time is related to women's empowerment.

While empowerment is defined as the process of gaining the ability to make strategic life choices, much of the measurement of empowerment focuses on smaller decisions. We focus on decisions in the sphere of agricultural production or on use of income, but not the strategic life choices about who to marry, how many children to have, and whether and where to engage in paid employment. One reason is that much of the work on women's empowerment in agriculture focuses on understanding how projects or interventions can improve women's empowerment or monitoring to ensure that the project does not

disempower women. But projects with a time horizon of 2-5 years are unlikely to affect women's ability to make these strategic choices. So, we look at outcomes that may be shifted within the time horizon of the project.

A final key lesson is that the various dimensions of women's empowerment are related. While they may sometimes move together, there may also be trade-offs among them. We have seen a number of instances where the relationships between income, control over time and women's empowerment involve conflicting goals. The emic perspectives of the women themselves are necessary to understand if they feel more empowered by earning an income, even if it increases their work burdens. But it should not be expected that increasing women's empowerment in one domain will have positive impacts on empowerment in other domains. Our approach in seeking "method equality" is showing us that often, conditions outside the narrow range of the classic factors of production of land, labor, and credit, can have significant influence on women's engagement in agriculture. Who you marry, when you have children, and how many children you have can also act as constraints or enablers of whether or not women can successfully participate in or benefit from agriculture and empower themselves in the process.

A number of important questions have surfaced during our work and call for continued research and consideration. First, it would be useful to provide more evidence on how and under what circumstances men's and women's understandings of empowerment differ. What are the conditions under which it is more acceptable for women to be seen as making strategic decisions? Does the important role that group membership contributes to empowerment scores rest in part the legitimacy associated with a group decision? And related to this issue, is a question of how empowerment differs across women within the same family or household. It would be useful to better understand how empowerment is changing over time and across generations, but also to understand how the acceptability of women playing greater roles is perceived.

A second set of issues that is particularly relevant for development programs seeking to empower women is whether any of the dimensions of empowerment are preconditions for others. Do women need

control over productive resources before they can be involved in decision-making around productive activities? And is participation in groups a necessary precondition for women to have control over credit?

The conversation about women's empowerment will continue to benefit from mixed methods approaches to capture both the extent of changes in the different components of empowerment as well as what these shifts mean for women and their households. Based on this conversation over many years, we have not only identified key insights about women's empowerment but have also surfaced new questions that a mixed methods approach can help to answer.

REFERENCES

- Acosta, M., Wessel, M. Van, Bommel, S. Van, L. Edidah, J. Twyman, L. Jassogne, and P.H. Feindt. 2020. What does it Mean to Make a ‘Joint’ Decision? Unpacking Intra-household Decision Making in Agriculture: Implications for Policy and Practice.” *Journal of Development Studies*, 56(6): 1210–1229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2019.1650169>
- Aliaga, M. and B. Gunderson. 2006. *Interactive Statistics* (3rd ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Alkire, S., R. Meinzen-Dick, A. Peterman, A. R. Quisumbing, G. Seymour, and A. Vaz. 2013. “The Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index.” Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative Working Paper No. 58. <http://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ophi-wp-58.pdf>
- Alsop, R. and N. Heinsohn. 2005. [Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators](#). World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3510. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Ambler, K., C. Doss, C. Kieran, and S. Passarelli. 2020. “He says, she says: Spousal disagreement in survey measures of bargaining power.” *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 69(2): 765-88. <https://doi.org/10.1086/703082>.
- Appadurai, A. 2004. 'The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition', in V. Rao and M. Walton (eds.) *Culture and Public Action*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Bernard, H. R. 1994 “Methods Belong to All of Us,” In R. Borofsky. (ed) *Assessing Cultural Anthropology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. pp 168-179.
- Bernard, H. Russell. 2006. *Research Methods in Anthropology*. 4th ed. Lanham: AltaMira Press.
- Boserup, E. 1970. *Woman’s Role in Economic Development*. London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.
- Bryan, E. and E. Garner. 2020. “What does Empowerment Mean to Women in Northern Ghana? Insights from Research Around a Small-Scale Irrigation Intervention.” IFPRI *Discussion Paper* 1909. Washington, DC: IFPRI.
- Cheater, A. (ed.) 1999. *The Anthropology of Power*. London: Routledge Press.
- Collins, P. H. 2015. “Intersectionality’s Definitional Dilemmas.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41: 1–20. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112142>.
- Davies, R. and J. Dart. 2005. “The Most Significant Change’ (MSC) Technique: A Guide to Its Use.” UK: Prepared by authors. <http://mande.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/MSCGuide.pdf>
- Donald, A., G. Koolwal, J. Annan, K. Falb, and M. Goldstein. 2020. “Measuring Women’s Agency.” *Feminist Economics*, 26(3): 200–226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2019.1683757>
- Doss, C. R., C.D. Deere, A.D. Oduro, and H. Swaminathan. 2015. The Gender Asset and Wealth Gaps. *Development*, 57(3–4): 400–409. <https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2015.10>
- Doss, C. R., C. Grown, and C.D. Deere. 2008. Gender and Asset Ownership: A Guide to Collecting Individual-Level Data. Policy Research Working Paper No. 4704. World Bank, Washington, DC. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/6779/WPS4704.pdf>
- Doss, C., C. Kovarik, A. Peterman, A. Quisumbing, and van den Bold, M. 2015. “Gender inequalities in ownership and control of land in Africa: myth and reality.” *Agricultural Economics*, 46: 403–434. <https://doi.org/10.1111/agec.12171>
- Doss, C.R., R.S. Meinzen-Dick, A. Pereira, and R. Pradhan. 2020. “Women’s empowerment, extended families and male migration in Nepal: Insights from mixed methods analysis.” IFPRI, *Discussion Paper* 1977. Washington, DC: IFPRI (IFPRI). <https://doi.org/10.2499/p15738coll2.134159>

- Eissler, S., J. Heckert, E. Myers, G. Seymour, S. Sinharoy, and K. M. Yount. 2021. “Exploring Gendered Experiences of Time-Use Agency in Benin, Malawi, and Nigeria as a New Concept to Measure Women’s Empowerment.” IFPRI *Discussion Paper* 2003. Washington, DC: IFPRI.
- Fintrac, Inc. and Cultural Practice, LLC. 2018. Increasing Women’s Profitable Participation in Market Systems Technical Note. Washington, DC: Fintrac, Inc.
https://www.agrilinks.org/sites/default/files/resources/call_2_eefs_increasing_womens_prof_participation_in_ms_final.pdf
- Gates, M. F. 2014. “Putting Women and Girls at the Center of Development.” *Science* 345 (6202): 1273-5.
- Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM). 2017. “Women’s Entrepreneurship 2016/2017 Report.” London: Global Entrepreneurship Research Association.
<https://www.babson.edu/Academics/centers/blank-center/globalresearch/gem/Documents/GEM%202016-2017%20Womens%20Report.pdf>
- Golla, A.M., A. Malhotra, P. Nanda, and R. Mehra. 2011. “Understanding and Measuring Women’s Economic Empowerment: Definition, Framework and Indicators.” Washington, DC: ICRW.
<http://www.icrw.org/sites/default/files/publications/Understanding-measuring-womens-economic-empowerment.pdf>
- Gingrich, A. and R. G. Fox (eds.). 2002. *Anthropology, By Comparison*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hannan, A., J. A. Heckert, L. James-Hawkins, and K. M. Yount. 2019. “Cognitive interviewing to improve women's empowerment questions in surveys: Application to the health and nutrition and intrahousehold relationships modules for the project-level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index.” *Maternal and Child Nutrition*, 16(1).
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/mcn.12871>
- Ibrahim, S. and S. Alkire. 2007. “Agency and empowerment: A proposal for internationally compatible indicators.” OPHI *Working Paper Series*. Oxford: OPHI. <http://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/OPHI-wp04.pdf>
- International Labor Organization. 2019. *World Employment Social Outlook: Trends*. Geneva: ILO.
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_670542.pdf
- Jackson, C. 2003. “Gender Analysis of Land: Beyond Land Rights for Women?” *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 3(4): 453–480. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0366.00062>
- Johnson, N., J. Njuki, E. Waithanji, M. Nhambeto, M. Rogers, and E. Hutchinson Kruger. 2013. “The Importance of Gender in a “Gender Blind” Asset Transfer Program: Lessons from Dairy Development in Mozambique.” In A. Quisumbing, R. Meinzen-Dick, J. Njuki, and N. Johnson (eds.) *Learning from Eight Agricultural Development Interventions in Africa and South Asia*. Washington, DC: IFPRI. <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/learning-eight-agricultural-development-interventions-africa-and-south-asia>
- Kabeer, N. 1999. “Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment,” *Development and Change*, 30: 435-464.
- Kim, E, A. Myrzabekova, E. Molchanova, and O. Yarova. 2018. “Making the ‘empowered woman’: exploring contradictions in gender and development programming in Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey*, 37(2): 228-246
- King, Deborah K. 1988. “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology.” *Signs*, 14(1): 42-72.

- Malapit, H., K. Sproule, C. Kovarik, R. Meinzen-Dick, A.R. Quisumbing, F. Ramzan, E. Hogue, and S. Alkire. 2014. “Measuring Progress Toward Empowerment: Women’s Empowerment In Agriculture Index: Baseline Report.” Washington, DC: IFPRI, OPHI, and USAID. <http://www.ifpri.org/publication/measuring-progress-toward-empowerment-womens-empowerment-agriculture-index-baseline>
- Malapit, H.J., A. Quisumbing, R. S. Meinzen-Dick, G. Seymour, E. M. Martinez, J. Heckert, D. Rubin, A. Vaz, K. M. Yount and Gender Agriculture Assets Project Phase 2 (GAAP2) Study Team. 2019. “Development of the project-level Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (pro-WEAI).” *World Development*, 122 (Oct): 675-692.
- Malapit, H.J.L., K. Sproule, and C. Kovarik. 2017. “Using cognitive interviewing to improve the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index survey instruments: Evidence from Bangladesh and Uganda.” *Journal of Agriculture, Gender and Food Security* Vol. 2. Issue 2: 1-22. <https://agrigender.net/views/cognitive-interviewing-to-improve-women-empowerment-from-bangladesh-and-uganda-JGAFS-222017-1.php>.
- Meinzen-Dick, R., D. Rubin, M. Elias, A. A. Mulema, and E. Myers. 2019. “Women’s empowerment in agriculture: Lessons from qualitative research.” IFPRI *Discussion Paper* 1797. Washington, DC: IFPRI. <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/womens-empowerment-agriculture-lessons-qualitative-research>
- Meinzen-Dick, R., & E. Mwangi. 2009. “Cutting the web of interests: Pitfalls of formalizing property rights.” *Land Use Policy*, 26(1): 36–43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2007.06.003>
- Narayan, D. 2005. “Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives.” Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Oxfam. n.d. “Ten harmful beliefs that perpetuate violence against women and girls.” <https://www.oxfam.org/en/ten-harmful-beliefs-perpetuate-violence-against-women-and-girls>
- Pradhan, R., R. Meinzen-Dick, and S. Theis. 2019. “Property rights, intersectionality, and women’s empowerment in Nepal”. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 70:26-35. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.05.003>
- Quisumbing, A., D. Rubin, and K. Sproule. 2016. “Subjective Measures of Women’s Economic Empowerment.” Paper prepared for UN Foundation conference “Beyond-Aid Approaches to Promoting Gender Equality” in Washington, DC (Nov 2-3). <https://data2x.org/resource-center/subjective-measures-of-womens-economic-empowerment/>
- Quisumbing, A. et al. 2014. Reducing the Gender Asset Gap through Agricultural Development. A Technical Resource Guide. Washington, DC: IFPRI. <http://ebrary.ifpri.org/utils/getfile/collection/p15738coll2/id/128594/filename/128805.pdf>
- Quisumbing, A.R., R.S. Meinzen-Dick, N.L. Johnson, J. Njuki, J. Behrman, D.O. Gilligan, C. Kovarik, A. Peterman, S. Roy, E. Waithanji, D. Rubin, and C. Manfre. 2014. “Reducing the gender asset gap through agricultural development: A technical resource guide.” Washington, DC: IFPRI. <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/reducing-gender-asset-gap-through-agricultural-development-technical-resource-guide>
- Quisumbing, A., R. Meinzen-Dick, J. Njuki, and N. Johnson (eds.). 2013. “Learning from Eight Agricultural Development Interventions in Africa and South Asia.” Washington, DC: IFPRI. <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/learning-eight-agricultural-development-interventions-africa-and-south-asia>
- Quisumbing, A. R. and McClafferty, B.. 2006. “Using gender research in development.” *Food Security in Practice Technical Guide Series 2*. Washington, DC: IFPRI. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2499/0896297551>

- Quisumbing, A. (ed.). 2003. "Household decisions, gender, and development: A synthesis of recent research." Washington, DC: IFPRI.
- Quisumbing, A. 1995. "Gender Differences in Agricultural Productivity: A Survey of Empirical Evidence," IFPRI *Discussion Paper* 5. Washington, DC: IFPRI.
- Quisumbing, A.R., K. Sproule, E.M. Martinez, and H. Malapit. 2020. "Do tradeoffs among dimensions of women's empowerment and nutrition outcomes exist? Evidence from six countries in Africa and Asia." *Food Policy*, 100 (February). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2020.102001>
- Revinga, A. and M. Dooley. 2020. "What works for women microentrepreneurs? A meta-analysis of recent evaluations to support female entrepreneurship." Brookings Institution, *Working paper* #142 Global Economy and Development. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/What-works-for-women-entrepreneurs_final.pdf
- Rosaldo, M. and L. Lamphere. 1974. *Woman, culture, and society*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Rowlands, J. 1995. "Empowerment examined." *Development in Practice*, 5(2): 101–107.
- Rowlands, J. 1997. *Questioning empowerment: Working with women in Honduras*. Oxford, UK: Oxfam. <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/oxfam/bitstream/10546/121185/5/bk-questioningempowerment-honduras-010197-en.pdf>
- Roy, S., J. Ara, N. Das, and A.R. Quisumbing. 2015. "Flypaper effects" in transfers targeted to women: Evidence from BRAC's "Targeting the Ultra Poor" program in Bangladesh." *Journal of Development Economics*, Vol. 117: 1-19. <https://pdf.sciencedirectassets.com/271688/1-s2.0-S0304387815X00046/1-s2.0-S0304387815000656/main.pdf>
- Rubin, D. et al. 2018. "Qualitative research on women's empowerment and participation in agricultural value chains in Bangladesh." Report submitted to USAID/Bangladesh. Dhaka: IFPRI. <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/qualitative-research-womens-empowerment-and-participation-agricultural-value-chains>
- Rubin, D. 2016. "Qualitative methods for gender research in agricultural development." IFPRI *Discussion Paper* 1535. Washington, D.C.: IFPRI. <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/qualitative-methods-gender-research-agricultural-development>
- Saito, K. A. 1994. "Raising the Productivity of Women Farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa." World Bank *Discussion Paper* 230. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Slavchevska, V., C.R. Doss, A.P. de la O Campos, and C. Brunelli. 2020. "Beyond Ownership: women's and men's land rights in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Oxford Development Studies*, 49(1), 2–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2020.1818714>
- Smith, L., U. Ramakrishnan, A. Ndiaye, L. Haddad, and R. Martorell. 2003. "The Importance of Women's Status for Child Nutrition in Developing Countries." IFPRI *Research Report* 131. Washington, DC: IFPRI.
- Wang, C. and M. Burris. 1997. "Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment." *Health Education and Behavior*, 24(3) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/109019819702400309>
- Yanagisako, S., and C. Delaney (eds.). 1995. *Naturalizing Power: Essays in Feminist Cultural Analysis*. New York: Routledge.

ALL IFPRI DISCUSSION PAPERS

All discussion papers are available [here](#)

They can be downloaded free of charge

INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

www.ifpri.org

IFPRI HEADQUARTERS

1201 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005 USA
Tel.: +1-202-862-5600
Fax: +1-202-862-5606
Email: ifpri@cgiar.org