



# Measuring women's empowerment in agriculture



Leah Natongi

A Ugandan woman being interviewed to collect data for WEAI

The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)—part of the PIM portfolio and a joint effort of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), and USAID's Feed the Future Initiative—is the first comprehensive and standardized measure of women's empowerment and inclusion in the agricultural sector.

Launched in 2012, the Index aims to increase understanding of the linkages between women's empowerment, agricultural productivity, and food security. By doing so, it can help to diagnose empowerment gaps, identify and prioritize interventions to close these gaps, and later test the effectiveness of interventions. The tool is composed of two sub-indices: the first one measures the degree of women's empowerment in five domains (decisions about agricultural production, access to and decision-making power over productive resources, control over use of income, leadership in the community, and time use), and the second one measures gender parity in empowerment within the household.

The WEAI [baseline report](#), released in 2014, provides a comprehensive analysis of women's empowerment in agriculture in 13 countries in 5 regions. This study finds that, across most countries and regions, the greatest constraints

## KEY PARTNERS

International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), USAID's Feed the Future Initiative

## YEARS

2012–2016

## RESEARCH FLAGSHIP

Crosscutting Gender, Partnership, and Capacity Building

## GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Global

## CORRESPONDING RESEARCHERS

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## Key facts

- › WEAI is the first comprehensive and standardized measure of women's empowerment and inclusion in the agricultural sector.
- › WEAI is being used in the monitoring and evaluation of USAID's Feed the Future Initiative in 19 countries.
- › As of August 2016, at least 57 external organizations had used the WEAI in 35 countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

to women's empowerment in agriculture are a lack of access to credit and lack of power to make credit-related decisions; excessive workloads; and a low rate of participation in groups. Although the magnitude of women's disempowerment is greater than that of men, men face similar constraints.

To facilitate use of the tool, the [WEAI Resource Center](#) released a number of [training materials](#), including a guide on how to implement, calculate, and analyze the index; an introductory video; and several webinars and tutorials.

In addition to being used in the monitoring and evaluation of USAID's Feed the Future Initiative in 19 countries, the WEAI has been adopted by a wide range of research and development organizations. As of August 2016, at least 57 external users, including universities, nonprofit organizations, international organizations (FAO, IFAD, UN Women), and CGIAR Centers (CIMMYT, ILRI, and IWMI), had used the WEAI in 35 countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Eleven doctoral students used the WEAI as part of their dissertation work in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Mexico, and Nepal. To further increase the uptake of the tool, a shorter version of the WEAI ([abbreviated WEAI, or A-WEAI](#)) was piloted in 2014.

Using WEAI data, researchers analyzed the role of women's empowerment in [agriculture and child nutrition in Nepal](#), how women's empowerment in agriculture affects [food security in Bangladesh](#), and which aspects of empowerment matter for [nutrition in Ghana](#). Findings from the analysis of nationally representative WEAI data in Bangladesh influenced the design of two major new projects: the [Agriculture, Nutrition, and Gender Linkages \(ANGeL\) project](#) of the Bangladesh Ministry of Agriculture, and the [Targeting and Realigning Agriculture to Improve Nutrition \(TRAIN\) project](#) in collaboration with BRAC, a Bangladeshi organization. To test the effectiveness of these projects in empowering women, both projects were selected to participate in the second phase of the [Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project \(GAAP\)](#), which will produce a project-level WEAI (Pro-WEAI), a more operationally flexible instrument than the original WEAI.

## Lessons learned

- › Measuring women's empowerment is challenging, but developing indicators helps guide governments, civil society organizations, and projects in addressing empowerment.
- › Major areas of disempowerment for women include poor access to credit, excessive workloads, and lack of participation in groups.
- › Women's empowerment is associated with positive outcomes for food security and nutrition in Bangladesh, Ghana, and Nepal.

## Related research outputs

- › Alkire, S., R. S. Meinzen-Dick, A. Peterman, A. R. Quisumbing, G. Seymour, and A. Vaz. 2013. "[The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index](#)." *World Development* 52: 71–91.
- › Sabroni, E., H. J. Malapit, A. R. Quisumbing, and A. U. Ahmed. 2014. "[Women's Empowerment in Agriculture: What Role for Food Security in Bangladesh?](#)" *World Development* 61: 11–52.
- › Malapit, H. J., K. Sproule, C. Kovarik, R. S. 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: International Food Policy Research Institute.
- › Cunningham, K., G. B. Ploubidis, P. Menon, M. Ruel, S. Kadiyala, R. Uauya, and E. Ferguson. 2015. "[Women's Empowerment in Agriculture and Child Nutritional Status in Rural Nepal](#)." *Public Health Nutrition* 18: 3134–3145.
- › Malapit, H. J., and A. R. Quisumbing. 2015. "[What Dimensions of Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Matter for Nutrition in Ghana?](#)" *Food Policy* 52: 54–63.

## Further reading

- › [WEAI Resource Center](#)
- › [WEAI training materials](#)

"There is consistent and credible evidence that when the status of women is improved, agricultural productivity increases, poverty is reduced, and nutrition improves, making the WEAI a crucial tool for monitoring progress toward these objectives."

—*Measuring Progress toward Empowerment: Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index: Baseline Report*

"At USAID, we use the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index to support implementation of the US Government's global hunger and food security initiative, Feed the Future. We especially appreciate the emphasis that PIM gives to gender work and applaud the design team's openness to learn and adjust to field conditions. The Index and the emphasis on analyzing sex-disaggregated data more broadly create new evidence on how best to break through gender-based barriers to growth."

—*Rob Bertram, Chief Scientist, Bureau for Food Security, USAID*