

Practical Tools and Frameworks for Measuring Agency in Women's Economic Empowerment

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About The SEEP Network



SEEP is a collaborative learning network. We support strategies that create new and better opportunities for vulnerable populations, especially women, to participate in markets and improve their quality of life.

For over 30 years, our members have served as a testing ground for innovative strategies that promote inclusion, develop resilient markets, and enhance the livelihood potential of the worlds' poor.

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About the SEEP Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group

Women's economic empowerment refers to a process by which women expand their ability to succeed and advance economically, and where they have the power to make and act on strategic life decisions in a context where this power was previously denied to them. The Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group (WEE WG) brings together a diverse group of people committed to advancing women's access to financial services, participation in markets and agency in making economic decisions.

Established in 2014, the WEE WG curates technical resources, sources information for state of practice reports, works collaboratively to develop new learning products, and hosts online discussions, webinars and learning events. Members benefit from peer-to-peer support and opportunities to strengthen alliances and shared commitments.

For more information, please visit <https://seepnetwork.org/WEE-Working-Group>.

Introduction

Traditionally, most economic development programs aim to achieve economic advancement as measured by increased per capita income. Programs emphasize the importance of increased access to resources, skills and assets, and many have focused on direct delivery of services.

However, the emphasis on promoting women's economic empowerment (WEE) within economic development has led to a shift in focus. First, it focuses on the largest marginalized population in the world – women – and, second, on enhancing a woman's capacity for self-determination – her empowerment. Furthermore, it underscores the relevance and importance of both access and agency to meaningfully improve the economic lives of women.

In light of this, there is increasing interest from economic programs to better understand, measure and capture agency across interventions in order to more deliberately pursue women's economic empowerment. Yet, there are many challenges in integrating agency in program planning and design, and specifically in measuring its impact.

Purpose

The objective of this brief is to identify and analyze the different techniques practitioners use to measure agency in programs that promote WEE. The brief is practitioner-led, with a focus on finding promising practical frameworks and tools; indicators, research techniques, and results; and lessons and good practices in measuring agency.

This brief is relevant for a wide spectrum of audiences, from those already dedicated to agency as a topic to those just now considering how to adopt elements of agency measurement, and provides guidance on what indicators and questions are relevant. It will provide frameworks and tools that have been tried and tested, with insights on learnings, good practices, and challenges. Our goal is to provide tips and lessons on how agency can be captured.

The brief serves as a starting point for practitioners from a range of development programs and practices, including monitoring and evaluation, program management, and implementation teams. The information comes from peers with practical experience in measuring agency and applying the results to improve program outcomes.

Methodology

The topic for the brief emerged from discussions with practitioners through the [SEEP Network's Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group](#) (WEE WG) and was led by WEE WG Steering Committee members from Oxfam, PRISMA, and Women for Women International. The members initiated a Call for Proposals to the SEEP community to capture best practices on agency measurement and draw on the wealth of experience from programs willing to contribute their learnings with the wider industry. Women for Women International also conducted a literature review to understand the scope of existing evidence on agency measurement which fed into the brief.¹

¹ While we only lightly address the definition of agency in this brief, publications reviewed are included in the footnotes list for reference.

What is Agency?

In her seminal work [Resources, Agency, and Achievements](#), Naila Kabeer defines agency as “the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them.”² Agency is not just action, she states, but furthermore it encompasses the “meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity” and can be exercised by individuals and collectivities. Agency involves increasing participation, voice, negotiation, and influence in decision-making about strategic life choices such as choice of livelihood, where to move, whether or whom to marry, or whether to have children.

This definition is based in part on Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach, which defines “‘agency freedom’ as the freedom to achieve whatever the person, as a responsible agent, decides he or she should achieve”³ and has formed the basis of many other institutions’ definitions of agency. The World Bank, for example, in their 2014 [Voice and Agency](#) report defined agency as “the capacity to make decisions about one’s own life and act on them to achieve a desired outcome, free of violence, retribution, or fear.”⁴

Why Is Agency Important to Women’s Economic Empowerment?

Improving women’s agency is crucial for advancing gender equality and the economic empowerment of women. Expanding agency brings broader gains for development and advances the agenda of poverty elimination and shared prosperity. When individual women have agency, they can make more informed and better financial choices for themselves and their families based on their own vision of the future. When workers have agency, they are able to negotiate fairer wages and safer working conditions.^{5,6,7,8} When collectives have agency, they can often negotiate better input and output prices.⁹ Fostering agency for the most marginalized groups enables them to improve the terms and conditions of their employment and production, raise wages and reduce poverty.¹⁰ Agency also has intergenerational value as a mother’s agency benefits her children as well as future generations.¹¹

Agency is part of the conceptual framework of empowerment. Returning to Kabeer’s [Resources, Agency and Achievements](#), empowerment is “the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability”^[1] which involves resources (preconditions), agency (process) and achievements (outcomes). In other words, empowerment is a process of change aimed at eliminating the condition of disempowerment. If a woman is disempowered, said process of empowerment focuses on enhancing her capacity for self-determination.

We can turn to the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW)’s [Understanding and Measuring Women’s Economic Empowerment](#) for a more focused definition of women’s economic empowerment. They define an economically empowered woman as one with the capacity to succeed and advance economically with the power to make and act on economic decisions.¹³ This incorporates two inter-connected components: 1) economic advancement and 2) power and agency. Both are necessary and influence the other. Economic success boosts women’s power and agency, while in turn, increased control and power over resources, norms and institutions can improve women’s ability to advance economically.

As a result, for effective WEE programming, it is crucial to understand and measure impact across economic advancement as well as agency and power. Agency is complex, multi-layered, requires working at multiple levels, across various dimensions, and is absolutely critical to women’s economic empowerment.

²Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435–464.

³Sen, Amartya K. 1985. “Well-being, agency and freedom: The Dewey lectures 1984.” *Journal of Philosophy* 82.

⁴Klugman, J. (2014). *Voice and agency: empowering women and girls for shared prosperity*. Washington, District of Columbia: The World Bank.

⁵ILO. (2019) <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Labour-Relations/Can-Collective-Bargaining-Create-a-Fairer-Economy#right-to-be-heard>
⁶Solidarity Center, ICRW, CDT (2019) “The Benefits of Collective Bargaining for Women, A Case Study of Morocco,” The Solidarity Center, Washington DC., <https://www.solidaritycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Benefits-of-Collective-Bargaining-for-Women-A-Case-Study-of-Morocco.219.pdf>

⁷Gammage, S. (2015) “Labour Market Institutions and Gender Inequality” in Janine Berg (ed) *Labour Market Institutions: An ILO Primer*, Geneva.

⁸Jaumotte, F. and C. Osorio Buitron (2015). “Inequality and Labor Market Institutions,” IMF Working Paper, Washington DC.

⁹Budlender, D. (2013). “Informal Workers and Collective Bargaining: Five Case Studies,” *Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing.* WIEGO Organizing Brief No. 9 October 2013.

¹⁰Jones, E., S., Smith and C. Wills. (2012) “Women Producers and the Benefits of Collective Forms of Enterprise,” *Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing*, <https://www.wiego.org/resources/women-producers-and-benefits-collective-forms-enterprise>

¹¹Ibid

¹²Kabeer, N. (1999)

¹³Golla, A., A. Malhotra, P. Nanda and R. Mehra (2018). *Understanding & Measuring Women’s Economic Empowerment: Definition, Framework and Indicators*. Washington, District of Columbia: International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

<https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Labour-Relations/Can-Collective-Bargaining-Create-a-Fairer-Economy#right-to-be-heard>
<https://www.solidaritycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Benefits-of-Collective-Bargaining-for-Women-A-Case-Study-of-Morocco.219.pdf>
<https://www.wiego.org/resources/women-producers-and-benefits-collective-forms-enterprise>



Why is Agency Hard to Measure?

Globally, gender indicators are lacking. [Open Data Watch and Data2x](#) report that in international and national databases gender indicators – essential for identifying and addressing barriers faced by women and girls – are either lacking or are entirely missing.¹⁴

As a sector, especially at a program level, we are much stronger at understanding and measuring women's economic advancement via economic outcomes: income, earnings, savings, and assets. These are concrete and often quantitative measures that we use to show success in the process of economic empowerment. Yet, this is only one part of the equation. If a woman makes more money as a result of an intervention but cannot control how it is used, she is still disempowered. That said, this important distinction is not easy to measure for various reasons.

First, agency is a difficult concept to both understand and define. Agency is interpreted differently across disciplines as well as within various spoken languages, creating confusion when there is not a one-to-one translation of central concepts and words. Furthermore, the lack of formative research and rigorous psychometric testing leads to poor quality data and analysis. The challenge is further exacerbated by several internal and external influencing factors such as self-perception and social norms. As J-Pal's [A Practical Guide to Measuring Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Impact Evaluations](#) shares, norms can affect agency by influencing which decisions feel like empowerment. For instance, some women may feel disempowered by taking charge of more household decisions, considering it an additional burden rather than a choice.¹⁵

Second, capturing self-confidence, relations and perceptions within households and communities is complex, and therefore agency is difficult to quantify and measure. The most common measurements of agency use decision-making modules, freedom of movement questions, and other measures such as control over spending. Yet, decision-making measures rarely account for how decision-making processes vary across time, genders, and spaces, as well as within the household versus the community. Moreover, there is limited understanding of incentives and trade-offs at play between decision-makers and how collective decisions are made.¹⁶

Finally, even within common measurements of agency – such as women's participation in household decision-making – measurements and ranking are different across research studies. The research expertise required to fully comprehend and assess the sensitivities around agency is often lacking or not prioritized in programs, staffing and resourcing.

¹⁴Data2x (2019). Bridging the Gap: Mapping Gender Data Availability in Africa.

¹⁵Glennerster, R., C. Walsh and L. Diaz-Martin (2018). *A Practical Guide to Measuring Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Impact Evaluations*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-Pal)

¹⁶Donald, Aletheia Amalia; Koolwal, Gayatri B.; Annan, Jeannie Ruth; Falb, Kathryn; Goldstein, Markus P.. (2017). *Measuring women's agency* (English). Policy Research working paper; no. WPS 8148. Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group.

Existing Frameworks and Measures

Agency is expressed in many ways through various constructs and frameworks and is often explained within the broader concept of empowerment, as in Kabeer's [Resources, Agency and Achievements](#).

In the World Bank's [Measuring Women's Agency](#) policy research working paper, agency is framed on the understanding of three concepts: (1) the person's ability to set goals in accordance with their values regarding a particular issue or decision, (2) whether they perceive themselves as able to achieve these goals, and (3) whether they are able to act towards achieving these goals. A unified, multidisciplinary conceptualization is thus proposed to address the challenges in current measurement, including the three crucial elements of agency: **the ability to set, achieve, and act on goals**.

The Center on Gender Equity and Health, University of California San Diego (UCSD)'s [Evidence-based Measures of Empowerment for Research on Gender Equality](#) (EMERGE) project is focused on improving quantitative measurement of empowerment and gender equality. It helpfully lays out [steps in the empowerment process](#) (see table). UCSD is furthermore developing an empowerment framework along nine dimensions, including economic empowerment, with measures that include gendered factors related to **decision-making control, financial inclusion, and use of time**.



Steps in the empowerment process (UCSD)

- a) Consciousness that choice exists but is denied** by a power structure.
- b) Aspiration for change in the power structure** in order to have choice and autonomy over strategic life decisions without barriers or negative consequences.
- c) Giving voice to one's goals and aspirations** to enact change, using both communication and negotiation.
- d) Agency to engage in a process of change.**
- e) Access to, control over, and use of assets and opportunity structures** to enact change.
- f) Resistance against (i.e., in relation to) those with power over them**, with a goal of dismantling the power structure that impedes self-determination.
- g) Resultant change and subsequent control over one's own strategic life choices**, with a goal of ensuring self-determination and self-actualization in a context of true choice.

The ICRW framework highlighted above illustrates the organization's construct of agency within a WEE framework, defined as the outcome of access to human, financial, social and physical capital, as well as agency. The two inter-related components – economic advancement and power and agency – are necessary to achieve better lives for women and their families. Their measurements of agency are focused around decision-making, mobility, self-confidence/efficacy, gender norms and gender responsibilities (care work) and measured at different levels: individual/household and community/institution.

[The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index \(WEAI\)](#) looks at empowerment, agency and inclusion of women, specifically within the agriculture sector. It analyzes the degree to which women are empowered in their households and communities across five domains: production, resources, income, and time, as well as the degree of inequality between women and men within the household through the Gender Parity Index (GPI).

Finally, at a more macro level, the [Social Institutions & Gender Index \(SIGI\)](#), looks at some of the structural limits to women's agency by focusing on discriminatory formal and informal laws, attitudes and practices that restrict women's and girls' access to rights, justice and empowerment opportunities. Global datasets that provide comparative data, for example, on [women's political participation](#) or the UN Women dataset on [Violence against Women \(VAW\)](#) also contribute to the macro-level agency measures. These macro and structural inequalities both influence women's economic empowerment.

The existing frameworks, therefore, measure agency:

- at different levels (individual household, community, systems/structures, norms);
- through dynamics, within and between the self and others (self-confidence, mobility, decision-making, care work/time use, violence);
- as a process towards a future state (goal setting, achievement and action);
- and by more traditional economic development outcomes (production, resources, financial inclusion).

Key Learnings

In the case studies submitted in response to the Call for Proposals launched for this learning brief, we found many similarities and trends amongst how agency is defined and measured, revealing the following six key learnings:

1. Measuring Different Levels of Agency

As with UCSD's empowerment process and ICRW's WEE framework, some cases looked at multiple levels of agency, from individual to interpersonal and community/collective to structural. Each case established measurements and indicators against the different levels, including:

- Norms and perceptions of self-efficacy (perceived agency),
- Interactions and dynamics with partners and family members and service providers (interpersonal agency),
- Engagement and participatory action with social groups (collective agency), and
- Assets, resources and opportunity structures (structural agency).

For example, [Women for Women International \(WfWI\)](#) focuses on gender equality and women's empowerment, and considers its agency measures intrinsically linked to economic and social outcomes. Thus, agency becomes central to all program outcome analyses. Each intervention must reflect on its own impact on various expressions of agency, whether at the individual, household, or collective levels.

Through a standard survey tool, WfWI measures agency through data points captured in baseline, end-line and one-and-two years after graduating from the program for a representative sample of women. Sample agency indicators focused on women's economic empowerment include:

Individual (Perceived) Agency	Household (Interpersonal) Agency	Collective Agency
<p>Improved self-confidence/self-efficacy; measured through a perceived self-efficacy index</p> <p>Improved economic self-sufficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Proportion of women who report being self-employed •Proportion of women who set aside money (either own earnings or household money) as savings 	<p>Women have household economic mobility decision-making power</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Who has the final say on whether a woman can work to earn money <p>Women have household financial decision-making power</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Who in the household decides which expenses to reduce or cut, if money is not available •Who in the household decides whether to purchase items (TV or lamp) <p>Intergenerational benefits of women's agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Share of school-aged boys in school and share of school-aged girls in school 	<p>Women's participation within economic groups; participation in cooperative, farmers' group or business group, a savings or credit group</p> <p>Women's leadership roles within groups;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Proportion of women who currently hold a leadership position in any type of social/ economic group <p>Women raising issues in their community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Proportion of women who have spoken up [in public] against hitting or slapping women •Proportion of women who discuss community issues with other women

The **William Davidson Institute (WDI) at the University of Michigan** has also assessed agency at different levels, using multi-dimensional frameworks for small inclusive businesses and their distribution networks. Going beyond economic outcomes, these frameworks include agency related indicators focused on individual capability and relationship well-being, and examine how connections with others and the local environment affect an individual's access to opportunities and resources. For example:

Individual Capability	Relationship Well-being
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Knowledge and skills the individual possesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Psychological and physical health •Self-efficacy (using the General Self-Efficacy Scale) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Work empowerment (using the Psychological Empowerment Instrument composed of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact) •Family empowerment (assesses changes in an individual's empowerment and role in the family) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Violence experienced at home and in the community (using a survey used by the World Health Organization)

These are very useful measures for considering how women's agency can be expressed at the individual, household, community and structural levels, and for leading towards the process of empowerment. However, being quantitative measures, they are limited in scope. As agency is quite complex, these measures may benefit from being paired with a qualitative perspective that captures more detail and nuance. Also, they assume a common understanding of agency which may not translate to all languages and cultural contexts.

2. Agency within Broader WEE Frameworks

Several submissions included agency within broader WEE frameworks and focused more on either economic outcomes and/or domains of change linked to economic empowerment. With the UCSD and J-PAL frameworks, as well as in the case studies, we found these similar domains:



It can be challenging to separate agency-specific measurement from these frameworks, but they shed light on the importance of holistically considering a women's journey towards economic empowerment across various factors.

For example, Market Development Facility (MDF) has approached agency by identifying seven domains monitored over time, as detailed in their publication [Beyond Income: Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment](#). The results are illustrated in the form of a spider diagram, enabling the organization to simultaneously measure and visualize the agency transformation.

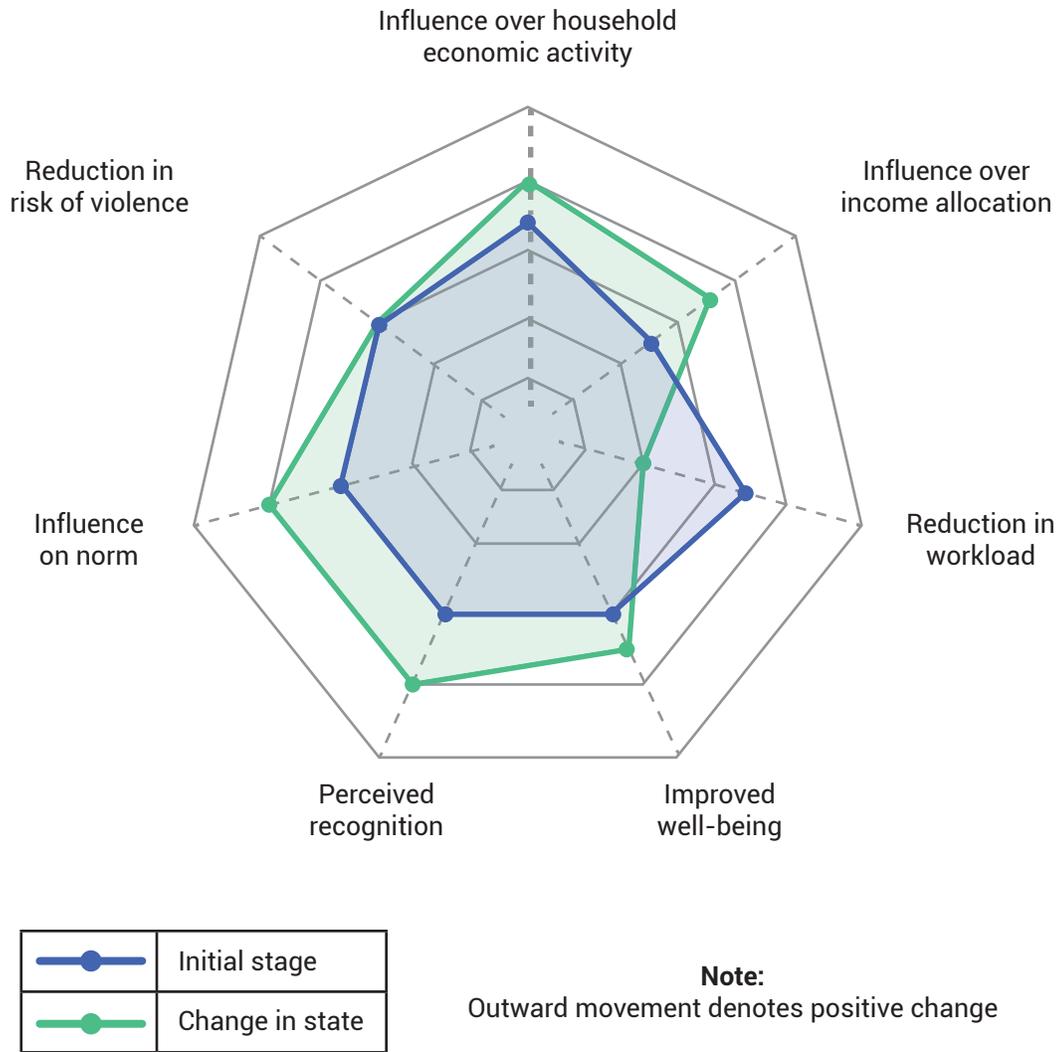


Figure 1 Measuring shifts in Agency – MDF



While all domains are essential to capture various aspects of agency, the following three are particularly useful for programs to consider during design and monitoring:

1. Improved well-being: It is important to understand whether a particular economic change results in satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Certain outcomes from shifts in workload may reduce a woman's well-being and can undermine program activities if misunderstood.

Some pre-conditions are essential to expect positive changes in agency. If a woman begins from a low-power position and has limited influence on income allocation, then an increase in household income may show a positive shift only in well-being, without affecting other domains, and cannot be claimed as full economic empowerment. Similarly, if program activities positively impact other domains but show an adverse impact on well-being, then programs likewise need to reevaluate whether this constitutes real economic empowerment.

2. Influence on gendered social norms: Programs can assess whether activities will encourage women to engage in new roles in new markets or whether women would move into traditionally male-led roles. Depending on the intensity of the shift, household and community members may push-back. This must be considered under the risk of violence domain and appropriate mitigation strategies put into place.

3. Perceived recognition: This assesses the position, visibility and perceived recognition of women at the household and community. Greater recognition often builds confidence and contributes positively to discussions and decision-making.

A second example is Palladium's WEE Framework: Programming in Practice. It captures a customized definition of WEE, building on the shared agreement that access and agency are the two core components, and identifies three fundamental steps to inform their pursuit – Gain, Retain and Choose.

It is under "Choose" where Palladium measures agency. Choose is where real agency and full WEE happen when women can exert their power of choice and decision-making over how to manage and allocate their incomes and resources. "Choose" includes:

- The capacity to make choices over investments
- Perception and confidence in having the ability/knowledge/skills to make economic choices
- Perception of self-agency, self-worth and self-determination over decision-making
- Ability and skills to capitalize economic opportunity and business management capacity

As these two cases highlight, breaking down domains of WEE and the elements of agency within them, and capturing data against these indicators, can be very useful. With a helpful visual representation, like MDF's spider chart, implementers can see positive and negative movements over time in different agency domains. This provides programs with an informative tool to monitor progress, identify risks, design better interventions and capture the real impact on the lives of women and their economic empowerment.

3. Self-Defined Agency, from the Start

Unlike standard measures of agency, several cases presented approaches in which women or communities define agency themselves and create measurements based on this self-determination.

Guided by J-PAL's recommendation to undertake formative qualitative work to define metrics, the [Arab Women's Enterprise Fund](#) (AWEF) developed a tailored qualitative research process based on focus group discussions (FGD) conducted at the start of the program. It allowed for the collection of specific agency characteristics and pathways directly from program participants. AWEF's research also applied a Social Return on Investment (SROI)¹⁸ lens to understand the instrumental value of women's agency in relation to economic and livelihood outcomes.

To structure this process, an imaginary woman was introduced to the group. This woman was constructed as a "typical case" with whom our participants could easily identify. The facilitator told the story of the woman as she progressed through an intervention but stopped short of providing any outcomes. Participants were asked to continue the woman's story and describe the agency-oriented outcomes she would achieve. Once a sufficient number of agency characteristics were identified, participants voted individually on which are most important and likely to occur to the imaginary woman, resulting in a continuum of indicators that can be used for quantitative agency measurement. During this process, participants were also encouraged to share their own individual stories.

Mennonite Economic Development Associates' (MEDA) [Jordan Valley Links](#) project offers another method of self-defining agency through an adaptation of [CARE's Gender Progress Markers \(GPM\)](#) approach. A central feature of GPM is that clients or beneficiaries define the results being measured. Through a participatory process, the project team facilitated discussions with clients and partners on what success looks like for increased women's economic empowerment. They focused on stakeholder perceptions of women and youth clients and client perceptions of themselves. The discussions yielded definitions of the successful outcomes defined by clients and partners, as highlighted in the text box: An Empowered Woman.

Southern Shounah / Food processing sector

An empowered woman is: Confident, organized, bold, can talk freely in any situation or place she is in, a leader, with good communication skills, humble, and productive. She serves her community, can create anything from scratch, and has patience to challenge the negative social norms (culture of shame) [in her community].

¹⁸SROI is a variation of the ROI measure that seeks to account for a much broader concept of value by incorporating social, environmental and economic costs and benefits in the analysis through a process of stakeholder engagement. In the case of WEE an SROI would seek to capture not only the business and financial benefits for the firm, but also the social impact created, for example, through women's increased decision-making and control over income within the household. https://seepnetwork.org/files/galleries/AWEF_WorkingWithThePrivateSectorToEmpowerWomen_FINAL.pdf

Self-defining agency is a strong approach, in that it better reflects context, culture, norms, and individual perceptions of agency. These measures also allow for capturing change over time in a more concrete and specific way. Conversely, the subjective, highly qualitative nature of such methods may prove difficult to compare across individuals, communities and contexts, as well as to standardize to higher level outcomes. They also require highly trained staff to facilitate data collection and reporting.

4. Utilizing Agency Measures for Program Adaptation

It is critical to unpack how agency measurement and its analysis feed into program adaptation.

Cited above, MEDA's Jordan Valley Links project offers insights into how periodic monitoring and evaluation data that tracks change in key WEE domains can inform program adaptation and design.

The GPM used simple agency measures – like mini-indicators – broken up into “Expect to see”; “Like to see”; and “Love to see.” These markers describe a progression of changed behaviors or attitudes by the target group that can be monitored and tracked.

Example of a Gender Progress Marker used for the Self Confidence indicator (MEDA)

Expect to see: Women are afraid of starting new businesses because of their limited financial and technical skills and have small home-based seasonal income generating activities.

Like to see: Women are comfortable with their levels of financial and technical knowledge and start unregistered home-based businesses which increased their household income.

Like to see: supported by the key facilitating partner, women are meeting market actors, marketing their products and negotiating for better prices.

Love to see: Women are making deals with different market actors and negotiating better prices

GPM data was collected every six months in a consistently updated project feedback loop. This complemented the original gender analysis and allowed the project to understand program participants' journeys. It also allowed project teams to reflect on gender integration processes and programming, and to better understand the capacities of private and NGO partners. Additionally, GPM data helped the project explore how to promote a greater emphasis on gender equality, like encouraging firms to provide additional business development services directly to women clients or asking private sector partners to feature gender awareness more strongly within their work.

Although this brief does not delve into programming for changes in women's agency, it is critical to clearly identify program objectives for success and measurement. As illustrated in MEDA's example above, simplified measures and frequent data collection allow for more flexible and adaptive programming.

5. Private Sector Collaboration in Agency Measurement

Measuring agency is not only relevant for WEE focused programs but can also be an influential tool for other market actors, particularly the private sector.

In an impact study for USAID and Coca-Cola, use of the Ipsos's [Women's Empowerment \(WE\) framework](#), which assesses dimensions of realities, self-perceptions and cultural norms, revealed that WASH interventions improve women's lives in multiple respects, including better health, time savings, higher education, and income. By using this WEE framework, the USAID/Coca-Cola team was able to visualize how agency interacts with other empowerment factors and that, when their WASH interventions paired with income generating opportunities, impact was multiplied far beyond the effects of individual programs. These direct impacts led to a tangible change in women's agency and their ability to participate in activities within and outside of the household, over time shifting the community's perceived value of women.

[The Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Promoting Rural Incomes through Support for Markets in Agriculture \(PRISMA\)](#) captures household decision-making dynamics, including women's influence on both economic and non-economic expenditures. The information is presented to agriculture input companies as "market intelligence data" to identify new market segments that can be tapped into. As a result of this customer segmentation, companies have developed new promotional programs and recruited female agri-staff to provide female farmers with information on good agriculture practices, enabling them to influence decisions on which inputs to purchase. This has not only improved overall productivity for households, but has also reduced workloads for women.

By assessing women's roles and influence on household financial management, the business case for more inclusive agriculture training models is established. Programs can present data collected on agency to the private sector to identify new customers and suppliers, as well as design more effective sourcing, sales and distribution strategies that include women. That said, the complexities of the process of agency and empowerment should be addressed with caution, with more private-sector oriented programs focusing on sensitive topics that require research into household and community power dynamics.

6. When Measuring Agency, Need to Measure it Well

The 'how' of measuring agency is as important as 'what' we measure. Given its nature, measuring agency requires the collection of personal and sensitive data that often involves power/gender relations. Thus, maintaining high standards of data collection is critical while conducting agency-related research in order to maintain the integrity of the process and the research subjects.



WDI, cited above, emphasizes good data practices. It has adopted a unique and comprehensive approach of collecting rigorous agency-related data adapted to the local context, employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis to identify and track changes in key indicators over time. WDI follows the [Lean Research Framework](#) to ensure relevant data is collected in a rigorous, yet respectful and right-sized manner. The survey questions are adapted to the local context via pretesting through cognitive interviewing. As not all indicators apply to every population, this helps with selection and adaptation of context-relevant agency indicators. To increase the quality of data gathered and build internal capacity, WDI works closely with the organizations/businesses/programs to build the monitoring and evaluation capacity of their teams. This includes formal and informal trainings on topics such as ensuring appropriateness of all sensitive questions, considering power/gender relations during data collection, how to stop an interview if needed, etc.

As organizations and programs consider how to incorporate agency measurements, it is critical to have such protocols in place to ensure that agency is measured well. It is also essential to collaborate with independent committees – like the institutional review board (IRB), or research ethics board (REB) – and utilize their proposed research review methods to ensure they are ethical and protect the rights of human subjects. Many developing countries have established national or local IRBs in order to safeguard the ethical conduct of research.

Looking Forward

It is encouraging to see the level of interest among practitioners in developing their expertise in agency measurement. Several organizations and projects have identified innovative ways to measure and capture agency using creative techniques, interview scenarios, and specific indicators for measurement.

While some programs are more advanced in their thinking on agency, others are just beginning to integrate agency into their measurement and evaluation. Hence, this brief intends to share promising practices with the development community currently grappling with these issues of agency measurement. A future brief could focus on the program cycle and design for agency, as well as how to internalize it throughout the entire program life cycle.

The process of empowerment and the nature of agency are complex, culturally and contextually specific, and change over time. As such, measurement of these concepts must be guided by sound theoretical and conceptual underpinnings to provide meaningful monitoring and evaluation results for WEE programming. In the broader field, additional research investments are also needed on how to better define and measure WEE across the

different domains and levels, capturing both the objective and subjective dimensions, simply and reliably, and with the aim of developing measures valid across widespread countries and contexts.¹⁹

Each of the approaches presented herein have pros and cons. Agency cannot be wholly captured through quantitative means, no matter how locally appropriate and sophisticated a survey tool or how adapted it may be to the context. Nor can qualitative measures be the only solution, as they are also limited by hyper-specificity and thus difficult to compare across groups. Furthermore, the implementation of agency measures depends on highly trained people with the required capacity and skill to conduct interviews delving deep into household and societal assessments of agency.

Considering these challenges, we need to advocate and collaborate as a sector, working with research and academic partners, to advance our thinking on agency measurement. The SEEP WEE WG encourages audiences to try some of the existing tools and frameworks that can be contextualized across countries and programs, and then share experiences and challenges in using these tools with the wider community.

¹⁸SROI is a variation of the ROI measure that seeks to account for a much broader concept of value by incorporating social, environmental and economic costs and benefits in the analysis through a process of stakeholder engagement. In the case of WEE an SROI would seek to capture not only the business and financial benefits for the firm, but also the social impact created, for example, through women's increased decision-making and control over income within the household. https://seepnetwork.org/files/galleries/AWEF_WorkingWithThePrivateSectorToEmpowerWomen_FINAL.pdf

