

# WHY FOCUS ON WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING POWER IN AGRICULTURE SYSTEMS PROGRAMMING?

## INTRODUCTION

The decision-making context and related gender dynamics within households, businesses, and institutions can have a direct effect on food security outcomes and resilience capacities.<sup>i</sup> Women's and other underserved and underrepresented groups' limited agency and decision-making power within the agriculture sector are barriers to achieving Feed the Future's long-term programming goals, as well as broader women's economic empowerment and gender equality gains.<sup>ii</sup>

## WHAT DECISION-MAKING REFERS TO

Decision-making refers to an individual's ability and power to make and act on decisions and control resources and profits.

Many factors affect the decision-making power of women and men to “decide, influence, and exercise control over material, human, intellectual, and financial resources.”<sup>iii</sup> As shown in the graphic below, agriculture and food-related decisions are influenced by a range of factors according to the spheres in which decisions are made—whether within the household, in workplaces and workspaces (e.g., fields or job sites), or in supporting institutions (like in public meeting places and banks).



This note is part of a series on women's decision-making power in USAID agriculture systems programming.



### Note 1

“Why Focus on Women's Decision-Making Power in Agriculture Systems Programming?” explains what decision-making is, why it matters in Feed the Future programming, and how USAID can address imbalances of power and agency for better food security outcomes.



### Note 2

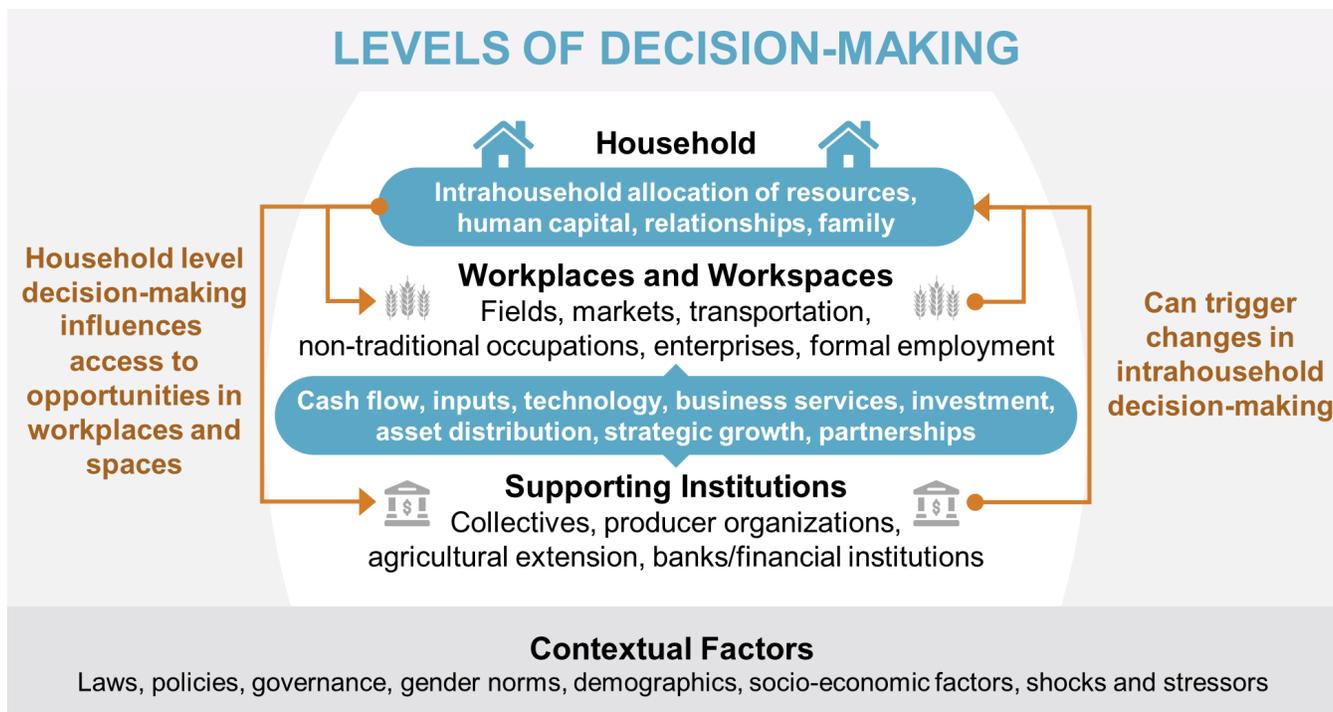
“How to Integrate Women's Decision-Making Considerations into Agricultural Programming” provides guidance on how to integrate women's decision-making into the USAID Program Cycle.



### Note 3

“Measuring and Assessing Women's Decision-Making Power in Agriculture Systems Programming” provides recommendations on monitoring, evaluation, and learning approaches.

Exhibit I. Influencing factors within the spheres of women’s decision-making



Women and men’s decision-making power in these spheres—where key agricultural decisions related to, for example, production, processing, marketing, and consumption are made—can promote or constrain productivity, profit, and resilience capacity of the household, business, community, or institution. The decision-making power dynamics within each sphere influence, and are often influenced by, other spheres. For example, household decisions on who engages in extension or other technical training are often shaped by institutional norms, policies, and practices around who is considered the head-of-household farmer. Similarly, the legal and policy framework that limits women’s ownership or control over land can shape who in the household can make and act on decisions regarding adoption of new farming practices.

Finally, decision-making around household labor and care responsibilities may limit or enable who within households can commit to full-time employment or participation or leadership positions within community organizations. A 2018 research study in Kenya found that women’s participation in community leadership was associated with higher agricultural productivity, and that women in more food-secure households tended to be more likely to participate in community leadership.<sup>iv</sup>

It is useful to consider the spheres in which women make decisions vis-à-vis a program’s agricultural development and food security goals. Programmatic interventions that seek to promote more agency or decision-making power for women in a particular sphere may prove integral to shifting power dynamics at various other spheres, and to achieving additional programmatic outcomes and impact.

The table on the next page presents illustrative decisions that may be made in the household, workplaces and workspaces, and community and institution as they relate to agricultural market systems and food security programming. The illustrative decisions are organized by the domains established in the Gender Integration Framework (GIF),<sup>v</sup> which seeks to promote agricultural productivity, food security, and resilience outcomes.

Exhibit 2. Domains and spaces of decision-making

<b>DOMAIN</b>	<b>HOUSEHOLD DECISIONS</b>	<b>WORKPLACE DECISIONS</b>	<b>COMMUNITY AND INSTITUTION DECISIONS</b>
Production	What to grow, rear, or produce How many types or varieties of a product to produce When to start or stop production activities	What to produce and/or add value to What innovations to pursue	Which activities to promote communal participation in Who can own or lease land
Resources	What productive resources, like seeds or vet drugs, to acquire Where to get loans	Who to hire Who to buy supplies from Who to extend credit to Where to get loans	To whom to extend informal loans or to allocate communal land or market space Who determines what services institutions offer members Who determines access to productive resources managed by institutions
Income	What property to sell or keep What price to sell at What to do with income	Whether to invest income in maintaining a business versus growing a business	Who determines distribution and use of profits from community or institution endeavors
Leadership	Who should speak for the household outside of the home	Who to promote into leadership roles Who should represent a business externally	Who can serve in leadership roles Who oversees finances for community groups Which other groups will interact with this group or institution
Time	Who should be spending time on production and other productive activities Who should be socializing outside of the household	Which employees should be involved in which activities Whether there are equal opportunities and support for all staff	When groups meet, and how much participation is required for membership
Human Capital	Who gets education and training in skills and knowledge to improve the household economic situation	Who will be offered training development opportunities How much to invest in current or future employees	Who to nominate for training development opportunities What expectations there are for those who receive training/mentorship
Technology	What technology to acquire Which products to apply technology toward Who should be using technology to improve household productivity (i.e., phones, equipment, chemicals, etc.)	What technology to acquire Which employees can use technologies when	What research and development efforts for new technologies to prioritize Who to involve in technology investment decisions How/where should technologies and information be disseminated

As illustrated above, there are many kinds of decisions, in various domains, that are relevant to the power dynamics of an agricultural market system. Decisions may be made unilaterally, by one individual, or with input, determination, and responsibility shared between spouses and other family members, employees, owners, community members, producer organization members, government institutions, and others. It is important to recognize the power dynamics of who is making what kinds of decisions and what impacts those decisions may have for programming to be effective.

## WHAT USAID MISSIONS AND IMPLEMENTERS CAN DO TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING IN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

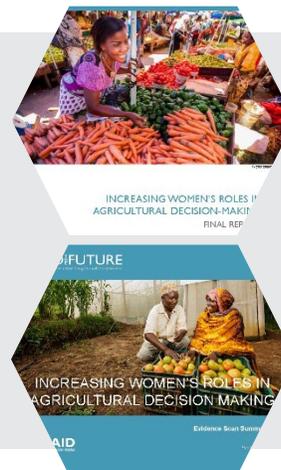
Feed the Future's Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS) includes gender equality and women's empowerment as a cross-cutting intermediate result and outlines key linkages and priorities to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. This gender equality and women's empowerment component—including a focus on promoting women's decision-making power—contributes to Feed the Future's three objectives to sustainably reduce global poverty, hunger, and malnutrition and intersect with all intermediate results related to these objectives.<sup>vi</sup>

Explicitly addressing gender inequality and decision-making power dynamics within agricultural market systems can improve the achievement of program outcomes and goals.

The GFSS points to the Feed the Future Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) and the Gender Integration Framework (GIF) to address and promote equitable decision-making within agriculture. Missions and implementing partners can use WEAI and GIF data to prioritize women's empowerment constraints, develop strategic activities, and monitor and evaluate outcomes.<sup>vii</sup> By intentionally programming to improve women's decision-making power, USAID can begin to transform harmful intrahousehold, institutional, and systemic dynamics to promote women's agricultural productivity and empowerment.

The [Increasing Women's Roles in Agricultural Decision-Making evidence scan report and summary deck](#)

provides an overview of programmatic approaches to promote women's decision-making power in agriculture.



**Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index:** "The WEAI is an innovative tool composed of two sub-indices: one measures women's empowerment across five domains in agriculture, and the other measures gender parity in empowerment within the household. The tool also measures women's empowerment relative to men within their households."<sup>viii</sup> (See [Note 3](#) for more information on the WEAI.)

**Gender Integration Framework:** "The GIF uses seven domains of empowerment that are linked to household agricultural productivity: agricultural decision-making, access to and control over resources, control over income, leadership, time use, human capital, and access to technology. The WEAI measures the first five GIF domains. Missions and partners can plug data into the framework to map planned and future activities and identify gaps. The GIF can also be used to identify and track indicators that measure priority outcome areas."<sup>ix</sup> (See [Note 2](#) for more information on the GIF.)

The box below provides examples where a Project or Activity might integrate women's decision-making power as a major or minor focus for agriculture-led economic growth and food security goals. See [Note 2](#) for more information on integrating women's decision-making power into the Program Cycle.

### Examples of Programmatic Approaches to Improve Women's Decision-Making Power<sup>x</sup>

- Social norms change methods (e.g., household dialogues)
- Components of technical agricultural training (e.g., planting, inputs, marketing)
- Role models, mentors, and gender champions (e.g., within producer organizations)
- Leadership, business, and literacy/numeracy skills (e.g., training men on the value of women leaders)
- Participation and leadership quotas (e.g., not just sit, exert influence)
- Women-only spaces (e.g., alternative or parallel spaces, not just mixed)
- Gender training with decision-making components
- Access to finance and assets with targeted components on women's decision-making power
- Encouraging active participation in institutions

<sup>i</sup> USAID, “[U.S. Government Global Food Security Strategy \(GFSS\)](#),” United States Agency for International Development policy, 2021: 40.

<sup>ii</sup> Access to productive resources, technologies, and services is fundamental to agricultural productivity and entrepreneurial success. USAID, “[Women’s Economic Empowerment: Pushing the Frontiers of Inclusive Market Development](#),” 2015: 3. Agency is also key because it implies a value to the voice, choice, and control of an individual in processes that affect their productivity.

<sup>iii</sup> USAID, “[ADS Chapter 205 Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in USAID’s Program Cycle](#).” USAID Automated Directives System, 2021.

<sup>iv</sup> Diiro, G.M., G. Seymour, M. Kassie, G. Muricho, and B.W. Muriithi, 2018, “Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture and Agricultural Productivity: Evidence from Rural Maize Farmer Households in Western Kenya,” PLOS ONE 13(5): e0197995, as referenced in Njukil, J., Eissler, S., Malapit, M., Meinzen-Dick, M., Bryan, E., and, and Quisumbing, A., 2021, “[A Review of Evidence on Gender Equality, Women’s Empowerment, and Food Systems](#),” IFPRI and UN Food Summit.

<sup>v</sup> Chmielewski, Maciej and Sahar Alnouri, “[AWE Tool Highlight: Feed the Future Gender Integration Framework](#),” Agrilinks, 2019.

<sup>vi</sup> USAID, “[Global Food Security Strategy FY 2022-2026](#),” 2021: 5.

<sup>vii</sup> Chmielewski and Alnouri, “[AWE Tool Highlight: Feed the Future Gender Integration Framework](#),” 2019.

<sup>viii</sup> IFPRI, “[Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index \(WEAI\)](#),” IFPRI web page, 2012.

<sup>ix</sup> Chmielewski and Alnouri, “[AWE Tool Highlight: Feed the Future Gender Integration Framework](#),” 2019.

<sup>x</sup> See the report on [Increasing Women’s Roles in Agricultural Decision-Making](#) for more information.

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