

“HOW TO” INTEGRATE WOMEN’S DECISION-MAKING CONSIDERATIONS INTO AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMMING

Women play critical roles in agriculture and food systems; yet their roles and power in decision-making—at all levels—are often limited by structural, institutional, and sociocultural barriers. Through effective programming and metrics, USAID can promote gender transformational change by identifying and addressing these key barriers to women's decision-making within agriculture and food systems. Systematically addressing the challenges to women's decision-making roles and power at all phases of the Program Cycle will also contribute to the sustainability of program outcomes for women, their families, and their communities.

INTEGRATING WOMEN’S DECISION-MAKING CONSIDERATIONS INTO STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ACTIVITY DESIGN VIA GENDER ANALYSIS

A gender analysis is a sub-set of a socio-economic analysis. The purpose of a gender analysis is to better “identify, understand, and explain gaps between males and females that exist in households, communities, and countries.”ⁱ Per USAID’s [ADS Chapter 201](#), [ADS Chapter 205](#), and [2020 Gender Equality and Women's](#)



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.

[Empowerment Policy](#) guidance, gender analysis is a key tool available to USAID to integrate gender effectively across the Program Cycle, including Agency-level policy and strategy formulation; Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCSs); Project and Activity design and implementation; and monitoring, evaluation, and learning. At the Activity level, gender analysis can also support systematic integration of gender issues and priorities in solicitations and during the technical evaluation processes. Gender analyses use both primary and secondary data to identify and understand the contextual factors that affect men and women differently.ⁱⁱ

USAID’s ADS Chapter 205 has identified five domains for gender analysis:

- Laws, policies, regulations, and institutional practices that influence the context in which men and women act and make decisions
- Cultural norms and beliefs
- Gender roles, responsibilities, and time use
- Access to and control over assets and resources
- Patterns of power and decision-makingⁱⁱⁱ

Layered with the Feed the Future Gender Integration Framework (GIF) (see Exhibit I and [Note 1](#) for more information on the GIF), an agriculture sector-focused gender analysis can examine women’s and men’s roles in decision-making and the challenges and opportunities that exist to enhance these roles for more equitable decision-making processes, which can ultimately promote improved agricultural productivity and food security outcomes.

In addition to secondary data and evidence reviews, consultations and interviews with stakeholders at various levels of the agriculture and food system can help respond to questions regarding who and how decisions are made and their further influence within agriculture and food systems. Each participant group at each level of the system will require contextualized interview questions that are adapted and respond to their specific activities, how they make decisions, and their broader influence within agriculture and market systems.

Exhibit I. The Feed the Future Gender Integration Framework Seven Domains of Empowerment



Guiding Questions to Prioritize Women’s Decision-Making Power in Gender Analyses

A gender analysis can help Activities identify priorities for promoting more equitable decision-making power by using guiding questions that cover three main levels of agriculture in which women make decisions: the household, workplaces and spaces, and supporting institutions. This box includes a sample of guiding questions that can support researchers as they reflect on evidence of constraints and opportunities surrounding women's decision-making roles within each level of agriculture systems.

Household

- What factors shape women’s decision-making power at the household and institution levels? What social norms affect women’s ability to participate in decision-making?
- How much decision-making power do household members have over different aspects of agricultural production and marketing?
- Are there specific aspects of agricultural production and marketing that women have more control over than their male counterparts?

- ✓ How much decision-making power do household members have over different types of household expenses?
- ✓ Are there specific household expenses that women have more control over compared to their male counterparts?

Business

- ✓ Who works outside of the home, and why?
- ✓ How much decision-making power does the family hold over the productive labor roles people play?
- ✓ Who has access to and control of resources, services, and decision-making?
- ✓ What productive assets do women and men own and use? What do they do with what they own to improve their farming business? How do they negotiate or make those decisions?

Institutional

- ✓ What kinds of roles and responsibilities do women have in the institutional context (informal networks, government institutions, membership organizations, nonprofits, and representative bodies)? If there are women in leadership roles, how are those women perceived? Do women and men hold an equal number of decision-making positions in these entities?
- ✓ What are the relationships between the key influencers and those involved in the flow of information within and from agricultural and food systems decision-making institutions?
- ✓ How do agricultural institution budgets allocate programs, training, and resources for men versus women? Who decides how these resources are allocated?

INTEGRATING WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING POWER INTO USAID AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS SECTOR SOLICITATIONS

By systematically integrating the findings and recommendations of gender and other relevant analyses, solicitations can ensure gender issues are comprehensively addressed in programming. This includes articulating gendered challenges in the problem statements, building gender considerations into objectives and targets, and other scope of work elements. Solicitations also allow for the opportunity to integrate gender priorities into different performance standards of an RFP or RFA and into selection criteria.^{iv} Building on USAID's ADS 201 and 205, USAID Mission staff can also integrate elements that will support women's more equitable decision-making into solicitations using similar approaches to those used for integrating gender.

KEY COMPONENTS FOR INTEGRATING DECISION-MAKING IN A SOLICITATION

Below is a selection of critical components for integrating considerations of women's decision-making power and roles as part of a gender approach within a solicitation.

BACKGROUND

With a women's decision-making lens, the background section can inform the offeror of the disparities in women's decision-making roles in agriculture systems and identify influential stakeholders that may have the power to transform social norms and behaviors to positively affect women's decision-making power. The background section offers the opportunity to clearly define women's agency and decision-making power and delve into power imbalances that may influence decision-making roles at different system levels and how these relate to the broader objectives of the Activity under solicitation.

SCOPE OF WORK, DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES AND OBJECTIVES, INSTRUCTIONS TO OFFERORS, AND REPORTING

These sections of a solicitation direct offerors to the program description and Activity specifics, including sex- and age-disaggregated targets for participants in the proposed interventions (further information related to indicator selection and data disaggregation can be found in [Note 3](#)). Based on the findings of the gender analysis and building on the key points outlined in the background, increasing women's decision-making power can be explicitly defined as a separate objective or standalone activity, or embedded in broader program objectives. Explicit direction on illustrative activities can assist the offeror in better responding to the scope of work. Guidance to the applicant could include specific resources, illustrations, or considerations to address when developing activities.

Solicitations may reference the [Increasing Women's Roles in Agricultural Decision-Making evidence scan report and summary deck](#) as background on this topic for offerors.



MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING

This is often a standalone section that outlines for offerors the parameters for specific monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) approaches, including exploration or justification of gender-related MEL approaches. Such approaches may include tracking and reporting on gender norms and roles via gender indicators, disaggregating data by sex, age, and other socio-demographic factors, and other gender-related activities that can affect program results.

The performance and monitoring section can provide gender-specific targets and illustrative gender-sensitive indicators. Offerors can incorporate quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure changes in women's decision-making roles where relevant to the program's efforts to address decision-making power and gaps.

[Note 3](#) provides further guidance on integrating women's decision-making considerations into MEL practices that can be used for MEL sections in solicitations.

INSTRUCTIONS TO OFFERORS OR PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

This section clearly describes how the offeror may be required to incorporate gender considerations, including about women's decision-making power and roles, into their proposal. This section can provide explicit instructions to justify the offeror's institutional capacity as it relates to gender and, specifically, in relation to programming that advances women's roles in decision-making. Instructions to offerors can also request Activity-specific gender analyses or assessments, whether baseline or midline, that include objectives and indicators for tracking women's decision-making roles and how they change. This section can also communicate expectations that data and information on women's decision-making be incorporated into the Activity's overall gender equality and social inclusion strategy, work plans, and collaborating, learning, and adapting processes where applicable.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

This section stipulates gender-related reporting requirements for simple and effective tracking of implementing partners' progress. Specific information on frequency and programmatic requirements will vary depending on the Activity, but ultimately, reporting requirements allow for routine capture of progress and impact data to indicate change over time. Explicit inclusion of requests for detailed progress on decision-making outcomes will ensure that the offeror tracks and evaluates the impact of their planned decision-making activities over time.

An example of outdated solicitation language about annual reports is:

“The contractor shall provide annual reporting detailing progress and accomplishments for all components of this Activity...”

Adapted language on reporting on decision-making could include:

“The contractor must provide annual reports that detail the progress for all components of the Activity. Quarterly reports must include qualitative and quantitative information on Activity accomplishments, including on women’s decision-making power. Where new gender-related constraints or opportunities arise, these should also be reported. All people-level indicators must be disaggregated by sex.”^v

EVALUATION OR SELECTION CRITERIA

Gender issues can be mainstreamed through the evaluation or selection criteria that are set to determine the offeror’s capacity, knowledge, and approach. A requirement for experience, skills, and capability related to enhancing women’s decision-making power specifically in agriculture systems can require offerors to place greater emphasis on Activity interventions that seek to close identified gaps in women’s agricultural decision-making power.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROPOSAL EVALUATION

To ensure that women’s decision-making power is included in a proposal, technical evaluations can apply women’s agency-informed evaluation criteria that prioritize women’s decision-making power.

Sample Evaluation Criteria – Key Questions

- ☑ Does the offeror provide feasible and realistic tactics/strategies to address the barriers women face in gaining more decision-making power in agricultural spaces? The proposal may present strategies for creating spaces where women can gain agency at multiple levels—household, community, and the larger system.
- ☑ Does the MEL plan show consideration for measuring women’s decision-making power among indicators and learning agenda questions?
- ☑ Does the management plan show specific staff assigned with roles and responsibilities related to promoting women’s decision-making roles? Are sub-partners accountable for specific interventions?
- ☑ Do offerors demonstrate organizational capacity to successfully implement women’s decision-making interventions in agriculture and food systems? Do they have prior experience?
- ☑ Are the proposals evidence-based around what does and doesn’t work?
- ☑ Does the plan for activity design and implementation approach include the collection and use of data on women’s decision-making power?

Evaluating the extent to which gender and women’s decision-making power concerns have been incorporated into the proposal requires that at least one member of the evaluation committee has technical knowledge on agriculture and gender issues, including equitable decision-making. If this expertise is not present, the evaluation team members can bring in outside reviewers to provide insights and engage in discussions as necessary.

The criteria for evaluating proposals are typically developed alongside the solicitation. The proposal evaluation plan may specify gender and women’s decision-making factors to inform the evaluation committee members’ review. Providing specific examples in the evaluation criteria and plan can support evaluation committees with

the information they need to assess the extent to which the proposal is comprehensive and addresses the women’s decision-making considerations outlined in the solicitation.

The table below is a sample evaluation form that reflects a subset of gender-focused evaluation factors for the evaluation committees to consider when reviewing proposals. This example showcases how important it is to identify critical gender-based factors, such as women’s decision-making power, within the evaluation criteria to ensure the appropriate offeror and activities are represented in the program design. This was adapted from USAID’s [“Tips for Integrating Gender into USAID Agriculture Sector Solicitations.”](#)^{vi}

Sample Evaluation Form^{vii}

Factor	Rating
<i>1. Technical Understanding and Approach (30 points)</i>	
a. Activities integrate gender issues, including women’s decision-making, throughout	
b. Innovative, creative approach	
<i>2. Key Personnel: Senior Agriculture Advisor (15 points)</i>	
a. Amount and type of experience in gender and agriculture	
b. Amount and type of experience in training or management	
<i>3. Institutional Capability (15 points)</i>	
a. Relevant experience in gender and agriculture	
b. Clarity of management plan	

Evaluation Factor 1: Technical Understanding and Approach

Evaluation of the offeror’s/applicant’s technical understanding and approach will be based on the comprehensiveness of proposed activities and their ability to affect gender-related constraints to agriculture. The sub-factors described below are of equal value:

- 1. Activities integrate gender throughout, addressing the root causes of gender-related constraints, including women’s decision-making in agriculture and identifying gender-related needs and opportunities
- 2. Innovative technical approaches and creative merit of proposed methodology to achieve an increase in agricultural productivity

Evaluation Factor 2: Key Personnel, Senior Agriculture Advisor

Evaluation of key personnel will be based on a qualitative assessment of the proposed candidate. In-depth knowledge of the country’s agricultural systems is required. The advisor must also be proficient in analyzing gender-related factors that affect participation in the agriculture sector, including familiarity with women’s empowerment and decision-making. They must be able to develop a gender analysis and conduct training on gender issues in agriculture.

The key personnel evaluation sub-factors listed below are of equal value:

- 1. Amount (years) and type of experience on Activities that addressed gender-related constraints and needs in agriculture
- 2. Amount (years) and type of experience in developing innovative approaches to addressing gender issues and increasing agricultural productivity

Evaluation Factor 3: Institutional Capability

Evaluation of the offeror’s/applicant’s institutional capability will be based on its institutional commitment to addressing gender and its prior experience successfully addressing the types of gender concerns identified in the solicitation. The sub-factors described below are of equal value:

- 1. Relevant experience in gender and agriculture, including experience in gender analysis and gender training and decision-making
- 2. Clarity of management plan

ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION: PLANNING AND REPORTING FOR ENHANCED WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING POWER

After contracts or agreements are awarded and implementation begins, Activity managers can identify, evaluate, and suggest and/or approve adjustments to ongoing activities to ensure promoting or increasing women's decision-making power is reflected in Activity outcomes and impacts as planned. To support this, Activity managers can review and ask guiding questions while reviewing Activity documents, such as periodic reports, annual work plans, and budgets to ensure activities are gender-focused and include decision-making.

Guiding Questions for Review of Activity Management Deliverables and Products

- How are women's roles in decision-making affecting Activity outcomes?
- Is the Activity reporting on progress in promoting or increasing women's decision-making power at regular reporting intervals?
- Is the Activity proposing any new activities or seeking to course correct activities to better address women's decision-making roles?
- To what extent have gender advisors developed the work plan? Will the USAID Mission gender advisor or point of contact review the work plan?
- Is there a budget allocated for work plan activities to promote women's decision-making?
- Is it clear which activities are promoting or have the potential to promote positive changes in women's decision-making roles?
- To what extent is gender analysis informing the Activity's current approaches? Is the Activity incorporating gender analysis into reports, strategies, and action plans?
- To what extent are women represented in leadership throughout the Activity, and what method (for example, quotas or contracts) are they using to ensure this?
- Is there a full-time Gender Specialist included in the budget to support women's decision-making power activities?
- Has the Activity integrated a gender lens into the collaborating, learning, and adapting plan or approach, such as specific learning questions, custom metrics, or focused pause and reflect sessions?

ⁱ USAID. “[ADS Chapter 205 Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in USAID’s Program Cycle.](#)” USAID, 2021:10.

ⁱⁱ USAID 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ USAID 2021.

^{iv} USAID. “Tips for Integrating Gender into USAID Agricultural Sector Solicitations.” Prepared by Sandra L. Russo and Jillian Jenson for USAID, 2010. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadu833.pdf

^v Example adapted from “Tips for Integrating Gender into USAID Agricultural Sector Solicitations,” USAID, 2010.

https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadu833.pdf

^{vi} USAID. “Tips for Integrating Gender into USAID Agricultural Sector Solicitations.” USAID, 2010.

https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadu833.pdf

^{vii} USAID 2010, 20.

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This note was produced under the Advancing Women’s Economic Empowerment (AWE) Program’s Call Order 7, Increasing Women’s Role in Agricultural Decision-Making, funded August 4, 2020. The AWE Program enhances gender equality and women’s empowerment in agriculture programs by providing targeted technical assistance to Missions, implementing partners, the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security, and other USAID operating units to increase women’s participation, productivity, profit, and benefit in agricultural systems. AWE Call Order 7 is implemented by EnCompass LLC with MarketShare Associates and ACDI/VOCA.

This publication was made possible through support provided by the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), under the terms of Contract No.7200AA18A00010, Call Order No.7200AA20F50006. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. Government.

Suggested Citation:

Schneider, L., M. Bolden, L. Courbois, and K. Cheney. “How to Integrate Women’s Decision-Making Considerations into Agricultural Programming.” Prepared for the United States Agency for International Development under the Advancing Women’s Empowerment Program, Call Order 7. Rockville, MD: EnCompass LLC, 2022.