

MEASURING AND ASSESSING WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING POWER IN AGRICULTURE SYSTEMS PROGRAMMING

Women's decision-making power is influenced by a complex set of elements that introduce parallel measurement and assessment challenges for USAID programs. Because of this complexity, a measurement approach that includes a range of evaluation and measurement methods and tools may be most successful. With more data and understanding of this topic, USAID has the opportunity to achieve food security outcomes and women's economic empowerment gains through promoting women's roles in agricultural decision-making.

WHERE TO START: EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES TO MEASURE WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING POWER

Women's decision-making power typically appears in three main spheres within USAID agriculture and food systems programs: households, businesses, and institutions. Exhibit 1 reflects a brief sample of overarching questions across these spheres that can support USAID AORs/CORs and gender advisors/points of contact to better understand the constraints and opportunities to measuring women's decision-making power and roles in USAID agriculture and food systems programs. Exhibit 1 builds on [Note 2](#), which explores key guiding questions in other phases of the Program Cycle.



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. Guiding questions for USAID to ensure that measurement of women’s decision-making power is integrated in Activity-level MEL systems

Cross-cutting

- How might programming around intrahousehold, business, or institution-level gender-equitable decision-making affect Activity results?
- What gendered decision-making patterns exist, and which patterns may promote or hinder women’s inclusion in agriculture systems programming?ⁱ
- How does the Activity measure attitudes, beliefs, and social/cultural norms that affect women’s decision-making roles or participation at the household, business, or institution level?
- What kinds of decisions made by women or men are more likely to change?ⁱⁱ What changes in women’s decision-making roles or patterns are likely to have the greatest impact on achieving Activity results?

Household

Are data collected on whether information sharing occurs within the household that can affect women’s participation in decision-making on budgetary decisions?ⁱⁱⁱ

How does household members’ degree of decision-making power over different aspects of agricultural production and marketing affect Activity outcomes?

Business

Are program results affected by gender differences in decision-making roles within businesses? How?

Are data collected on whether changes in gender dynamics of household decision-making affect business decision-making, and the reverse?

Do data collected from agricultural businesses demonstrate differences in decision-making power among partners that jointly own a business?

Institution

Are data collected about women’s decision-making roles in supporting systems, or those systems’ influence on women’s inclusion in agriculture systems programming?

How does the representation of women in leadership roles and their degree of decision-making power affect agriculture and food systems institutions?

Are data collected on the return on investment or the business case for increasing women’s participation in institutional decision-making?

PROGRAM MONITORING

REVIEWING ACTIVITY-LEVEL INDICATORS

Operating units can review indicators based on their utility for understanding the performance and evolving context of their strategy, Projects, and Activities.^{iv} Indicators must be customized to the individual design and scope of a Project or Activity. When Activities submit custom indicators as part of their MEL plan or similar reporting, it is important that indicators measure how the following key elements (Exhibit 2) of women’s decision-making power change over time in relation to how the Activity is addressing or promoting those changes:

Exhibit 2. Incorporating decision-making elements in Activity-level indicators

<p>Where are decisions made?</p> <p>In the household or community; within a business or supporting institution (banks, media, civil society organizations/ NGOs, investors); in a work environment (fields/ farms, marketplace, businesses, producer organizations, cooperatives)</p>	<p>Who makes decisions...</p> <p>Women, men, heads of household, other family members, head of single parent households, business owners/employees, institution leaders, etc.</p> <p>...and how?</p> <p>Solely by one person, accounting for their role in the household, community, institution, etc.; jointly (and to what degree) between partners, community members, etc.; and to what degree of transparency, consultation, or negotiation</p>	<p>What resource are decisions made about?</p> <p>At the household level: income, agricultural inputs, land use, credit/savings/loans, production, household purchases, mobility, etc.</p> <p>At the business/institution level: use of productive/business assets, use of income from agricultural production, social networking/ information sharing, institutional policies, leadership roles, etc.</p>
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Source for “What resources are decisions made about?”: J. Williamson, “[Measuring Women’s Decision-Making Power in Agriculture](#),” 2021.

Additionally, where possible, Activities may acknowledge enabling environment factors—such as the policies and practices of government, industry associations, and other policy/regulatory bodies—and external influences, including community and religious leaders, perceptions of women’s decision-making roles, and social norms and cultural beliefs, as part of the description in the performance indicator reference sheet.

Research indicates that there are specific gaps in measuring women’s decision-making power in agricultural institutions, and Activities may need to develop custom indicators to address this gap.^v Further, there are no evident [standard foreign assistance indicators](#) or custom indicators (based on a review by the authors) that directly measure women’s decision-making power in agriculture systems.

Activity-level indicators must demonstrate a clear link between an intervention and the change or result it is intended to measure. Exhibit 3 includes some examples of how different types of Activities may establish custom indicators that measure outcomes related to women’s decision-making power. These indicators are illustrative; when Activities develop custom indicators, they should be accompanied by a performance indicator reference sheet that includes a comprehensive definition and disaggregation guidance.

Exhibit 3. Examples of Activity-level custom indicators

HOUSEHOLD LEVEL	COMMUNITY OR INSTITUTION LEVEL
<p>Activity A is incorporating household budgeting activities in its programming to increase women’s participation in decisions about household expenditures. Therefore, it selected the custom indicator level of input in making decisions about major household expenditures^{vi} (with the options of no input or input in few, some, or most/all decisions).</p>	<p>Activity B has been working with producer organizations to develop participatory gender strategies focused on increasing women’s and youths’ participation as active members and in leadership roles. Therefore, it selected the indicator number of females/youths who report [accepted] contributions to organizational decisions.^{vii}</p>
<p>Activity C is working to build the agricultural assets of rural households by providing training and facilitating livestock transfers to women. Many women face mobility constraints, so they are working to provide assets that can be maintained from their home. The project selected the indicator level of input in making decisions about livestock production/marketing.^{viii}</p>	<p>Activity D formed a cooperative for small-scale producers, primarily women, that provided training in production techniques and the use of new technology, advocated to local government for expanded extension services, and organized self-help groups that cultivated women leaders of other cooperatives and unions. The Activity chose the indicator proportion of women who have participated in group decision-making in any type of social/economic group.^{ix}</p>



MEASURING WOMEN’S DECISION-MAKING POWER AGAINST THE FEED THE FUTURE RESULTS FRAMEWORK

The [Feed the Future Indicator Handbook](#) presents indicators designed to measure progress against each result in the Feed the Future results framework. Women’s decision-making power is particularly relevant to cross-cutting Intermediate Result 3, “Increased gender equality and female empowerment” (see [Note 1](#) for more information on the results framework). Exhibit 4 includes illustrative standard performance and resilience indicators to which Activities may contribute results on women’s roles in decision-making; however, the zone of influence (ZOI)-level indicators listed below are not suitable for the Activity level.

Exhibit 4. Illustrative Feed the Future Indicators^x

INDICATOR #	INDICATOR TITLE & DESCRIPTION
EG.3-f	Abbreviated Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (A-WEAI) [ZOI-level] (standard performance) <i>Components of the A-WEAI, including indicators on input in production decisions, ownership of assets, access to and decisions on credit, and control over use of income, may be utilized to better understand women's decision-making power and roles. Data for this indicator can be collected at the ZOI level via a population-based survey.</i>
EG.4.2-7	Number of individuals participating in U.S. Government-assisted group-based savings, micro-finance, or lending programs [IM-level] (standard performance) <i>This indicator tracks individual participation in group-based savings, microfinance, or lending programs disaggregated by sex, which may provide high-level, initial insights into women's influence or control over income within a household (however, more data specific to women's decision-making power would need to be collected). Data for this indicator are intended to be collected at the Activity level.</i>
EG.3.2-24	Number of individuals in the agriculture system who have applied improved management practices or technologies with USG assistance [IM-level] (standard performance) <i>Like EG.4.2.7, when disaggregated by sex, this indicator can provide high-level insights into women's decision-making in management practices or use of technology.</i>
EG.10.4-7	Number of adults with legally recognized and documented tenure rights to land or marine areas, as a result of USG assistance [IM-level] (standard performance) <i>When disaggregated by sex, this indicator can provide high-level insights into women's productive decision-making, as land tenure is a significant factor.</i>
RESIL-b	Index of social capital at the household level [ZOI-level] (resilience) <i>This indicator measures the ability of households in a specific geographic area to draw on social networks to get support to reduce the impact of shocks and stresses on their households. Disaggregation by gendered household type may shed light on how social networks influence women's decision-making power at the household or community levels. Data for this indicator are intended to be collected at the ZOI level.</i>

DATA DISAGGREGATION AND REPORTING

In addition to the importance of disaggregating data by sex, age, and other social factors, data specific to women's and men's roles in decision-making may also be disaggregated by specific elements, depending on how indicators, survey questions, or other quantitative data methods are structured. For example, data may be disaggregated by:

- The unit of analysis (at the individual, household, intrahousehold, community, or institution level)
- Gender of the decision-maker compared to the head of household's gender^{xi}
- Owner or member type (e.g., entrepreneur, women-led/owned firm, cooperative member)
- The degree of decision-making power (whether decisions are self-reported as being made solely or jointly)
- Resources over which decisions are made (e.g., income, agricultural production, agribusiness decisions, and specific commodities, such as the types of crops grown, inputs for production, and livestock raising)^{xii}

Implementing partners may regularly report data collected on custom indicators related to women's decision-making power in annual and other periodic reports. Activities may collect more substantive data on gendered patterns of decision-making via gender and social inclusion analyses, assessments, or other evaluation activities. Data presented in these types of reports may include qualitative data from men and women within households and institutions, paired with quantitative data on women's decision-making roles and patterns.

EVALUATION

Evaluation questions. Evaluations and other types of assessments offer an opportunity to explore the degree and extent of women’s decision-making power in agriculture and food systems programs. Mission staff can use the following guiding questions to ensure that an evaluation design, starting with evaluation questions, can effectively begin to explore women’s roles in decision-making within the context of an individual Activity.

Guiding Questions: Gender-Equitable Decision-Making Considerations in Evaluation Designs

- ☑ What development challenges may be addressed by promoting women’s decision-making power within this USAID Activity?
- ☑ Does the evaluation design include a learning question or sub-question that directly addresses gender-equitable decision-making power or roles in agriculture systems?
- ☑ Do questions regarding control over income, assets, financial services, and other resources include a sub-question or mention of decision-making?
- ☑ For questions that directly address women’s decision-making power, is there specificity and clarity in where decision-making is happening, who is making decisions and how, and over what resources decisions are made?
- ☑ What Activity results are intended to promote women’s decision-making power, and are there evaluation questions that address these result areas in relation to women’s decision-making power?
- ☑ What knowledge gaps around women’s decision-making power have been identified, and how do the evaluation questions seek to address those?

Methods. Evaluation designs attempting to measure gendered decision-making power will ideally include methods to collect quantitative data paired with validating qualitative data. There is substantial research showing that mixed methods are most effective for measuring and evaluating women’s decision-making power.^{xiii} A mixed-methods approach can help capture a more complete understanding of decision-making roles and better identify the extent to which men and women participate in decision-making.^{xiv}

When reviewing an evaluation design that explores women’s decision-making roles, Mission staff can look for or recommend quantitative data collection (such as surveys or the whole or adapted pro-WEAI); secondary data analysis of sources such as the A-WEAI, [Demographic and Health Surveys](#) (DHS), [World Bank Living Standards Measurement Study](#), and Feed the Future [population-based surveys](#); and qualitative data collection such as interviews, focus group discussions, and other techniques (see box).^{xv} Selected evaluation methods will ideally allow for comparisons to be made across countries, projects, and over time.^{xvi} Further, methods should account for the sensitivity and complexity of women’s decision-making power based on the context in which the study is taking place; therefore, any study should begin with a comprehensive desk review and employ Do No Harm approaches.

Qualitative Methods to Measure Women’s Decision-Making Power

- Key informant interviews
- Focus group discussions
- Most Significant Change
- Seasonality mapping
- Photo Voice
- Gender audit or organizational capacity assessment
- Direct observation and structured community activities
- Purchase decisions

Sources: [IFPRI Discussion Paper 02035: Measuring Women’s Decision-Making Power in Agriculture](#); [Examples of Non-Survey Instruments and Tips on Using Them](#)

LEARNING: USING DATA ON DECISION-MAKING TO INFORM ACTIVITY DESIGN AND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

As described in [Note 2](#), data on women’s decision-making power are critical for informing Mission strategy and programming. When developing strategies, designing new Activities, and drafting solicitations, Missions have a range of existing data sets and measurement tools to draw upon to determine what gaps exist in women’s decision-making power in agriculture and food systems activities, and how to prioritize those gaps to develop effective programming. This note highlights two existing measurement tools—the Abbreviated Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (A-WEAI) and the DHS—that Missions can use to better understand gaps in women’s empowerment specifically related to women’s decision-making power.

Abbreviated Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (A-WEAI). The [A-WEAI](#),^{xvii} a shorter, streamlined version of the original [WEAI](#), is an aggregate index reported at the country or ZOI level and is based on individual-level data collected by interviewing women and men within the same households. The A-WEAI assesses the degree to which respondents are empowered across five domains, each of which directly or indirectly measures women’s decision-making power.^{xviii} Feed the Future target country Missions collect A-WEAI data in their population-based surveys. A-WEAI data can offer Missions a clear picture of gaps that exist in women’s decision-making power in a specific context and within agriculture systems and can inform programming design and strategy development to address those gaps. Exhibit 6 provides an overview of the domains, indicators, and specific questions in the [data collection tool](#) from the WEAI and A-WEAI that address decision-making power.

Exhibit 5. A-WEAI domains and indicators



Exhibit 6. WEAI and A-WEAI questions that explore decision-making power^{xix}

DOMAIN/INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	QUESTION NO.	
		WEAI	A-WEAI
<i>Production</i> /Input in productive decisions	Degree of input on decisions about production activities	G2.02	G2.03, G2.05
<i>Production</i> /Autonomy in production	Entire module explores autonomy in decision-making based on responses to scenarios and stories related to each dimension	G5(B)	
<i>Production</i> /Input in productive decisions <i>Income</i> /control over use of income	Who takes decisions and the extent of making personal decisions	G5(A).01- G5(A).02	G2.02, G2.04
<i>Income</i> /Control over use of income	Degree of input on use of income from production activities	G2.03	G2.05
<i>Resources</i> /Access to and decisions on credit	Decisions about borrowing money or other resources	G3.08- G3.09	G3.05- G3.06
<i>Resources</i> /Purchase, sale, or transfer of assets	Who makes decisions about productive capital	G3.03- G3.06	

The Demographic and Health Survey. The [Demographic and Health Survey Phase 8 \(DHS-8\) instrument](#) collects household data at the national level on population, health, HIV, and nutrition in 90 countries.^{xx} Missions may use the DHS-8 as a contributing source to compare intra-household decision-making and, paired with other agriculture systems measurement tools and metrics, to further inform strategy development and Activity design. The DHS-8 includes three questions that capture who holds decision-making power over household purchases and how to spend income, and other questions about control over assets.^{xxi} Exhibit 7 shows illustrative questions from the DHS-8 woman’s and man’s questionnaires related to decision-making power:

Exhibit 7. Illustrative DHS-8 questions relevant to women’s decision-making power in the household

QUESTION	RESPONSE OPTIONS	QUESTION NO.	
		WOMAN	MAN
Who usually decides how the money you earn will be used: you, your [partner], or you and your [partner] jointly?	Respondent; [partner]; respondent and [partner] jointly; other	919	609
Who usually decides how your [partner's] earnings will be used: you, your [partner], or you and your [partner] jointly?	Respondent; [partner]; respondent and [partner] jointly; [partner] has no earnings; other	921	
Who usually makes decisions about making major household purchases?	Respondent; [partner]; respondent and [partner] jointly; someone else; other	923	611
Do you own this or any other house either alone or jointly with someone else?	Alone; jointly with [partner], and/or someone else; alone and jointly; does not own	925	612
Do you have a title deed or other government recognized document for any house you own?	Yes/No/Don't Know	926	613
Is your name on this document?	Yes/No/Don't Know	927	614
Do you own any agricultural or non-agricultural land either alone or jointly with someone else?	Alone; jointly with [partner], and/or someone else; alone and jointly; does not own	928	615

RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

CATEGORY	RESOURCE
General background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFPRI's Measuring Women's Decisionmaking, 2015 • Women's Empowerment: Data for Gender Equality (WEDGE)'s Measurement Brief: Women's Household Decision-Making Agency, 2020 • Feed the Future Advancing Women's Empowerment (AWE) Program's Increasing Women's Roles in Agricultural Decision-Making Report, 2021 • FinEquity's Measuring Women's Empowerment in Financial Inclusion, 2021 • The SEEP Network's Practical Tools and Frameworks for Measuring Agency in Women's Economic Empowerment, 2019 • ACDI/VOCA's Measuring Women's Decision-Making Power in Agriculture, 2021
Indicators and metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICRW's Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment, 2011 • Ipsos' Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment, 2018 • United Nations Foundation/ExxonMobil Foundation's Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines for Women's Economic Empowerment Programs, 2015 • The SEEP Network's Practical Tools and Frameworks for Measuring Agency in Women's Economic Empowerment, 2019 (pages 9–10) • TANGO International's CARE Pathways Project - Global Baseline Report, 2013 (pages 60–61) • CGIAR's Indicators of Gendered Control Over Agricultural Resources: A Guide for Agricultural Policy and Research, 2016 (pages 21–22)
Macro-level data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The World Bank's Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) • Feed the Future population-based surveys • Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) • Demographic and Health Survey Phase 8 (DHS-8)
Quantitative methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Project-level WEAI (Pro-WEAI) and the Project-level WEAI (Pro-WEAI+MI). To learn more about how to select the appropriate WEAI version, see IFPRI's Choosing the Right WEAI tool. • The Gender Asset Gap Project • J-PAL's Practical Guide to Measuring Women's and Girl's Empowerment in Impact Evaluations, including Appendix 1: Examples of Survey Questions Related to Women's Empowerment
Qualitative methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFPRI Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project (GAAP)'s GAAP2 Qualitative Data Collection Protocols, 2016 • J-PAL's A Practical Guide to Measuring Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Impact Evaluations, Appendix 2: Examples of Non-Survey Instruments and Tips on Using Them • ACDI/VOCA's Assessing the Needs of Women in Ethiopia through the FEED III Project, 2021 (programmatic case study)
Data management and disaggregation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CGIAR's Standards for Collecting Sex-Disaggregated Data for Gender Analysis: A Guide for CGIAR Researchers • FAO's Sex-disaggregated Data in Agriculture and Sustainable Resource Management, 2019

- ⁱ Mercy Corps, “[Household Dialogue Toolkit](#),” Portland, Oregon: 2018.
- ⁱⁱ Mercy Corps, “Household Dialogue Toolkit.”
- ⁱⁱⁱ Mercy Corps, “Household Dialogue Toolkit.”
- ^{iv} USAID, “[ADS Chapter 201 - Program Cycle Operational Policy](#),” 2021.
- ^v Petrulla, N., K. Cheney, A. Guy, and E. Hohenberger, “[Evidence Scan: Increasing Women’s Roles in Agricultural Decision-Making](#),” prepared for the United States Agency for International Development under the Advancing Women’s Empowerment Program, Call Order 7. Rockville, MD: EnCompass LLC, 2021.
- ^{vi} USAID, “[Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index – A-WEAI Version](#),” 2020.
- ^{vii} Williamson, Jenn, “[Measuring Women’s Decision-Making Power in Agriculture](#),” Agrilinks, November 9, 2021.
- ^{viii} Rao, Smriti, “[Indicators of Gendered Control Over Agricultural Resources: A Guide for Agricultural Policy and Research](#),” CGIAR Gender and Agriculture Research Network: Working Paper No. 1. CGIAR Consortium Office and International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), Cali, Colombia: 2016.
- ^{ix} Anand, M., Mecagni, A. and Piracha, M., “Practical Tools and Frameworks for Measuring Agency in Women’s Economic Empowerment,” Arlington, Virginia: The Seep Network, 2019.
- ^x USAID, “[Feed the Future Indicator Handbook](#),” 2019.
- ^{xi} Rao, Smriti, “[Indicators of Gendered Control Over Agricultural Resources: A Guide for Agricultural Policy and Research](#),” CGIAR Gender and Agriculture Research Network: Working Paper No. 1. CGIAR Consortium Office and International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), Cali, Colombia: 2016.
- ^{xii} IFPRI, “[Updated WEAI Module](#),” IFPRI, 2016.
- ^{xiii} Rao, Smriti, “[Indicators of Gendered Control Over Agricultural Resources: A Guide for Agricultural Policy and Research](#).”
- ^{xiv} Williamson, Jenn, “[Measuring Women’s Decision-Making Power in Agriculture](#),” Agrilinks, November 9, 2021.
- ^{xv} Doss, C., and Rubin, D., “[Exploring Women’s Empowerment Using a Mixed Methods Approach](#),” 0 ed. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute, 2021.
- ^{xvi} Doss, C., and Rubin, D., “[Exploring Women’s Empowerment Using a Mixed Methods Approach](#).”
- ^{xvii} The Exhibit “A-WEAI Domains and Indicators” was sourced from: <https://media-s3-us-east-1.ceros.com/ifpri/images/2022/01/13/2a649e5288fd2a6767e68d4c2704c167/wheel5.png?imageOpt=1&fit=bounds&width=691>
- ^{xviii} IFPRI, “[WEAI](#),” IFPRI.
- ^{xix} IFPRI, “[WEAI](#).”
- ^{xx} Chhabra, N. and Hurtado, C., “[Women’s Household Decision-Making Agency](#),” College Park: WEDGE Program, University of Maryland, 2020.
- ^{xxi} USAID, “[DHS Model Questionnaire - Phase 8 \(English, French\)](#),” 2020.

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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 U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) 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:

Cheney, K., M. Bolden, L. Courbois, and L. Schneider. “Measuring and Assessing Women’s Decision-Making Power in Agriculture Systems 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.