

Computing Women's Work: Its methods

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Women's empowerment is of paramount importance for multiple development goals. However, it is much easier to discuss the importance of empowerment than it is to define the methods and tools needed to measure it. This requires research focused on the conceptual understanding of how we should measure women's empowerment, in a variety of facets, and the creation of tools and methods for doing so.

It is a known fact that unproductive work (including care) that women do are often unaccounted for. In fact, care sustains our societies but standard measures of economic activity only include care if it is provided for pay. Because these household services are largely performed by women, standard measures that leave them out underestimate women's economic contribution. Hence, in this regard it becomes important to compute and measure women's work. In this regard, 'Counting Women's Work' is an international research project dedicated to measuring the gendered economy, including unpaid care work. It is through measurement that we begin to value the role of care in society, to count the contributions of the women and men who provide it, and to reckon with its cost. Similarly, the teams under the Cross-Cutting Gender Research and Coordination flagship of the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets (PIM) have been working to address this need and to develop a range of methods for improving gender analysis in agricultural research.

Standardized tools for measuring women's empowerment generate comparable research across contexts.

The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), launched in 2012, and its variants are a significant contribution to the current methodologies for understanding women's empowerment. The WEAI is an aggregate index that summarizes women's empowerment in five domains for a given population, based on data collected from both women and men decision-makers in the same household. It allows for high-level comparisons across a portfolio, and at the same time, can be used for household, individual, and intrahousehold analysis.

Household decision-making

Husbands and wives often respond differently to questions about who makes decisions, and the lack of concordance provides important information. Different responses can be result of asymmetric information within the household. Extended households in which couples live with one set of their parents may have different patterns of decision-making, which will influence outcomes.

It is useful to understand not only ‘who’ makes decisions, but also ‘why’. In Senegal, researchers used a series of vignettes that described the reasons why a particular household member might be the one to make the decision. They found that outcomes that are often attributed to the gender of the decision-maker may be more accurately attributed to the structure of the decision-making process within the household and the norms associated with the process within the community.

It was also found out that ‘who’ within the household receives information may also affect the outcomes of household decisions. For instance, the ongoing research in Uganda is using videos of male and female commercial farmers to explore the links between the gender of the model farmer and the gender of the household member receiving the information on agricultural decisions. Preliminary results show that targeting women with the intervention has a positive effect on various empowerment domains and agricultural production.

Measuring asset use, control, and ownership

Asset ownership is an important dimension of women’s empowerment, and increasing evidence suggests that *who* owns the assets within households affects a range of household decision outcomes. Assets are not owned by households, but by people.

Qualitative analyses provide insights into the complex dynamics between empowerment and asset ownership. Using qualitative data in combination with household survey data on assets has shown that different answers from husbands and wives about ownership and control over assets often mean that they have a different understanding of the concepts.

Other methods for data collection

Cognitive interviewing is particularly helpful when collecting data on women’s empowerment, given the complexity of the concept and the diverse ways in which empowerment is understood and interpreted in different contexts. Cognitive interviews before

a survey is rolled out to the field can help clarify translations, identify ambiguous phrasing, and help improve data quality overall.

Traditional gender norms typically assign greater responsibility for domestic chores and care work to women. These tasks tend to be invisible because they are often unpaid and undervalued, and yet they may result in heavy work burdens for women and limit whether and how women can engage in other productive activities. Time use surveys are useful for understanding gender disparities in time burdens, and for designing effective policies and programs to address such disparities. Furthermore, time use data can help investigate the linkages between time use and nutrition outcomes.

Conclusion

The unpaid work needs to be measured as it is only through measurement that unpaid care work can be integrated into social science and policy analysis in ways not previously possible, leading to better policy-making around issues of labour and economic growth, social welfare, gender equity, and human capital investment. An internationally validated standardized tool such as the WEAI allows researchers to more accurately compare results across many different contexts — contributing to the understanding of women's empowerment in a broader sense — and can also be used alongside qualitative methods to understand the meanings of empowerment in local contexts. Experimental methods that unpack the household decision-making process enable researchers to go beyond the question of *who* is making the decision in the household, providing information on *how* and *why* certain individuals are making the decisions. Knowing which rights are held by which people is essential for effective programming. However, there are still limitations to the understanding of the optimal methods to measure women's empowerment and which tools are best suited for which contexts. Going forward, CGIAR must maintain a concerted effort toward producing high quality tools and innovative methods in the pursuit of improving our definitions and understanding of women's empowerment.