

EMBARGOED UNTIL 15:00 (GMT) Monday 27 February 2012

GROUNDBREAKING INDEX LAUNCHED TO EMPOWER WOMEN AND FIGHT HUNGER

A significant new breakthrough in the measurement of women's empowerment in developing countries is launched today. The "Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index" (WEAI) is the first measure to directly capture women's empowerment and inclusion levels in the agricultural sector.

The WEAI focuses on five areas: decisions over agricultural production, power over productive resources such as land and livestock, decisions over income, leadership in the community, and time use. Women are considered to be empowered if they have adequate achievements in four of the five areas. The Index also takes into consideration the empowerment of women compared with men in the same household, based on asking women and men the same survey questions.

The Index is a partnership between the US Government's Feed the Future initiative, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) of Oxford University. The index focuses on women because they play a critical role in agricultural growth in developing countries yet face persistent obstacles and economic constraints, limiting further inclusion in the sector.

Piloted in three countries with diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts—Bangladesh, Guatemala, and Uganda—the Index was developed to track the change in women's empowerment that occurs as a direct or indirect result of US government intervention under the Feed the Future initiative to tackle global hunger and food security. The US government will use the Index for performance monitoring and impact evaluations across Feed the Future focus countries.

"The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index marks a major advance in our ability to measure empowerment. It brings into stark relief the ways in which women are empowered, and the areas in which they are disempowered," said Dr. Sabina Alkire, OPHI Director and co-creator of the Alkire Foster method for measuring multidimensional poverty, which has been used to construct the index. "In giving us a new understanding of empowerment, it transforms our ability to better empower women and improve their lives."

"Through Feed the Future, President Obama's global hunger and food security initiative, we are fundamentally transforming our approach to agricultural development, working closely with partner governments, smallholder farmers and private sector players to make smart, cost-effective investments," said Dr. Rajiv Shah, USAID Administrator. "The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index will be used to monitor and evaluate Feed the Future programs and their impact on gender to ensure that our efforts are empowering women and supporting the essential role they play in reducing hunger and advancing prosperity."

Traditionally, money and education are used as indirect signposts of women's empowerment. The new survey questions used for the WEAI expose the weaknesses in these 'proxies' by showing, for example, that having money or being educated does not guarantee that women are empowered.

"Identifying gaps in empowerment is especially useful for designing interventions that are appropriate in terms of context and culture," said Dr. Agnes Quisumbing, IFPRI Senior Research

Fellow. “Knowing these gaps, policymakers will be in a better position to design and implement interventions to close the gaps.”

The WEAI pilot results show some surprising new findings:

In the sample from the Western Highlands of Guatemala, wealth is a poor indicator of empowerment—three-quarters of women in the wealthiest two-thirds of the population are not yet empowered.

In the southern Bangladesh sample, more than half of women are less empowered than the men with whom they share their house, yet they are usually confident speaking in public.

In the sample from rural parts of Uganda, lack of control over resources and time burdens contribute most to the disempowerment of women.

WEAI launch interview opportunities:

The WEAI will be launched at the UN Commission on the Status of Women on the 28th of February, 1.15-2.30pm, 2012 by Dr. Rajiv Shah, Administrator, USAID; Ann Tutwiler, Deputy Director General, FAO; Dr. Sabina Alkire, Director, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative; and Dr. Agnes Quisumbing, Senior Research Fellow, Poverty, Health and Nutrition Division, IFPRI; with co-hosts Her Excellency Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, State Minister of Women and Children Affairs, People's Republic of Bangladesh and His Excellency Efraín Medina, Minister of Agriculture, Republic of Guatemala. To attend the event, please email: USAID_RSVP@usaid.gov.

A media briefing call will also take place at 9AM EST/2PM GMT on the 27th of February.

For interviews and more information, please contact Lisa Hibbert Simpson at USAID, (202) 712-5114, Sarah Immenschuh at IFPRI, +1 (202) 862-5679, s.immenschuh@cgiar.org, or Joanne Tomkinson at OPHI, +44 (0) 1865 271528, joanne.tomkinson@qeh.ox.ac.uk.

Notes for Editors:

Calculation of empowerment using the WEAI

The WEAI is constructed using the Alkire Foster method for measuring multidimensional poverty and wellbeing. It has 10 indicators across five domains. Each of the domains is weighted equally, along with the indicators within each domain. A woman is defined as ‘empowered’ if she enjoys sufficiency in some combination of 4 of the 5 domains, or in some combination that reflects 80% of the weighted indicators. The number varies because the indicators carry different weights. The WEAI is an innovative new index comprised of two sub-indices: one measuring the Five Dimensions of Women’s Empowerment (5DE), and the second measuring gender parity (the Gender Parity Index, GPI). The 5DE sub-index shows how empowered women are, while the GPI reflects the percentage of women who are as or more empowered than the males in their households. For those households without gender parity, it also shows the “empowerment gap” that needs to be closed in order for women to reach the same level of empowerment as men.

The pilot regions

The Uganda pilot covered five spatially-dispersed rural districts in the North (Kole and Amuru), Central (Masaka and Luwero) and Eastern Regions (Iganga) of the country. The Guatemala pilot was conducted in the Western Highlands, in the departamentos (departments) of Quetzaltengo, San Marcos, Huehuetenango, El Quiché and Totonicapán, areas with a high concentration of indigenous populations. The Bangladesh pilot was conducted in the districts of Khulna, Madaripur, Barguna, Patuakhali and Jessore, in the south/southwestern part of Bangladesh close to the Indian border.

About the Index partners:

USAID

USAID is an independent federal government agency that receives overall foreign policy guidance from the Secretary of State. Its work supports long-term and equitable economic growth and advances U.S. foreign policy objectives by supporting:

- economic growth, agriculture and trade;
- global health; and
- democracy, conflict prevention and humanitarian assistance.

Feed the Future

Feed the Future is the United States Government's global hunger and food security initiative. It supports country-driven approaches to address the root causes of hunger and poverty and forge long-term solutions to chronic food insecurity and undernutrition. Drawing upon resources and expertise of agencies across the U.S. Government, this Presidential initiative is helping countries transform their own agricultural sectors to grow enough food to sustainably feed their people.

Feed the Future is the United States' contribution to a collaborative global effort that supports country-owned processes and plans for improving food security and promoting transparency. Through Feed the Future, the U.S. Government is renewing its commitment to agriculture and economic growth and focusing on harnessing the power of the private sector and research to transform agricultural development.

Our collective efforts advance global stability and prosperity by improving the most basic of human conditions: the need that families and individuals have for a reliable source of quality food and sufficient resources to purchase it.

IFPRI

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) seeks sustainable solutions for reducing poverty and ending hunger and malnutrition. IFPRI's mission is to provide policy solutions that ensure that all people in developing countries, particularly the poorest and other marginalized groups, have access to safe, sufficient, and nutritious food at all times.

IFPRI is a leader in research on gender and household decisionmaking in developing countries. Its gender and intrahousehold research program (1994-2001) provided rigorous empirical evidence that the bargaining power of men and women within households affects the allocation of household

resources, and that increasing resources controlled by women improves agricultural productivity, household food security, and investments in the next generation. The Gender and Assets research program (2009-present) is examining ways by which agricultural development programming can reduce the gap in assets controlled by men and women and thereby more effectively achieve development outcomes. (Read more about the Gender and Assets research program). IFPRI is one of 15 centers supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), an alliance of 64 governments, private foundations, and international and regional organizations.

OPHI

The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) is an economic research centre within the Oxford Department of International Development at the University of Oxford. OPHI aims to build a more systematic framework for reducing multidimensional poverty, grounded in people's experiences and values. Creating real tools that inform policies to reduce poverty, OPHI has two main research themes: multidimensional poverty measurement and missing dimensions of poverty data (improving data on topics like violence and empowerment).

The Alkire Foster method for multidimensional measurement, which underpins the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index and was developed by OPHI, is being implemented at both the national and international level around the world. Those using and adapting the method include: the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report Office (with the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in their flagship Human Development Report), and the Governments of Mexico, Colombia and Bhutan.

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