



PRESS RELEASE

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For more information, please contact:

Sarah Immenschuh, s.immenschuh@cgiar.org, +1 (202) 862-5679
Lisa Hibbert-Simpson, lhubbertsimpson@usaid.gov, +1 (202) 712-5114
Joanne Tomkinson, joanne.tomkinson@qeh.ox.ac.uk, +44 (0) 1865 271528

Groundbreaking Index Launched to Empower Women and Fight Hunger

Washington, D.C.—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.

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The Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index brochure, country case study profiles, and related information are available at: <http://www.ifpri.org/pressroom/briefing/women-s-empowerment-agriculture-index>

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 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.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) seeks sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty. IFPRI is one of 15 centers supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, an alliance of 64 governments, private foundations, and international and regional organizations. Please visit our website at www.ifpri.org.

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).