INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
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Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

Award Announcement – Ph.D. Dissertation Fellowships

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IFPRI is pleased to announce the 2012-2014 Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) Doctoral Dissertation Fellows: Jessica Ham (University of Georgia), Brooke Krause (University of Minnesota), Christopher Manyamba (University of Pretoria) and Greg Seymour (American University). The threefold goal of the fellowship is to strengthen understanding and evidence of the WEAI; expand understanding of WEAI dynamics through complementary qualitative and ethnographic work; and support promising researchers interested in gender and agriculture. Research proposals were selected from a strong pool of candidates and support research on one or more of 19 Feed the Future countries. Congratulations, Awardees!

Jessica Ham: Department of Anthropology, University of Georgia
Advisor: Dr. Bram Tucker
Dissertation title: "Growing Uncertainty: effects of food Insecurity and health on women's productivity in Upper West Ghana."

Recent research indicates that food insecurity is associated with poor mental health. What remains unknown is how this relationship influences behavioral patterns. This dissertation research will use mixed qualitative and quantitative methods in 12 months of fieldwork in the Upper West Region in Ghana (UWR) to trace a pathway between food insecurity and productivity. Such an approach will inform agricultural development agendas on the interactions that occur between culture, economy, health and behavior. First, this research will look at how gendered food provisioning responsibilities in the UWR shape differential experiences with food insecurity. Second, it will investigate how food insecurity influences mental health as measured through locally appropriate symptoms of anxiety and depression associated with levels of productivity. Third, systematic observational methods and qualitative interviews alongside the time allocation component of the WEAI will be used to measure the quantity and quality of women's productive capacity in economic activities. It is hypothesized that food insecurity will be associated with poor mental health and that poor mental health, in turn, will inhibit ability to meet immediate food needs. By tracing these behavioral patterns it will be possible to assess how the necessity of meeting immediate food needs also constrains investment of time and labor in economic activities that can reduce the risk of future food insecurity. Such an approach will demonstrate how food insecurity is not just an economic outcome, but a variable that instigates the perpetuation of vulnerable conditions.

Brooke Krause: Department of Applied Economics, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities
Advisor: Dr. Paul Glewwe
Dissertation title: "Social Capital, Women's Empowerment, and Trust: Can Informal Information Networks Improve Child Health and Nutrition in Highland Guatemala?"

The objective of this study is to empirically investigate levels of women's empowerment in Guatemala and its impact on human capital outcomes by studying the effect of social capital, in the form of informal information networks and trusted relationships, on child health and nutrition outcomes and the domains of the WEAI. With low literacy rates and educational attainment levels among women in rural areas of Guatemala, informal information networks are key pathways through which knowledge is accessed and transmitted. Several dimensions of the WEAI, decisions over agricultural production, power over productive resources such as land and livestock, and decisions over income can be important ways in which increasing women's empowerment is translated into improved child health and nutrition. However, the role of information and access to it are vital to making this connection between empowerment and improved child health. Social capital arising from daily market and nonmarket interactions between women can transform into informal information networks that can be used to acquire and disseminate knowledge about child health and nutrition. This study focuses on women's empowerment via power over resources, specifically, decision making over agricultural production, productive assets, and on spending income, and how partnering these dimensions with knowledge about child health and nutrition can provide additional insight on the applicability of the WEAI in research and policy. Additionally, the results of this research project may highlight an inexpensive policy for reducing chronic child malnutrition via the dissemination of health information through women's trusted networks and stocks of social capital.

Christopher Manyamba: Department of Agricultural Economics, Rural Development, and Agricultural Extension, University of Pretoria. Advisor: Dr. Sheryl Hendriks.
Dissertation title: "The Relationship between Women's Empowerment in Agriculture and Household Food Insecurity: Implications on Agriculture Policy and Objectives."
The study approach is to participate in the design and implementation of a household survey at the country level (Malawi) and thereafter conduct robust analysis in computing the WEAI and aggregate Food Security Score. In order to understand if empowering women in agriculture plays a critical role in agricultural growth and food security, using robust statistical models, the study will examine the association between the 5 domains of WEAI and household food security.The study aims to demonstrate the importance of the WEAI as a critical tool in determining household food security and how it can be incorporated in the mapping of key government strategies of sustained economic growth and sustained availability and accessibility of food at national level. At household level the results will inform policy in seeking ways to facilitate a process where women and their communities are empowered to determine their destiny within the context of agriculture and food security and the need for women to take part in all levels of decision-making and make use of their knowledge in reducing structural poverty. Lastly the results will not only be critical in informing stakeholder national dialogues on the fight against hunger, but will serve as a benchmark for tracking country level progress toward gender equality, which is one of the Millennium Development Goals.

Greg Seymour: Department of Economics, American University. Advisor: Dr. Maria Floro. Dissertation title: "Multidimensional Empowerment Measurement: Three Essays Investigating the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index."

This dissertation empirically investigates three aspects of the WEAI and marks one of the first empirical investigations of multidimensional empowerment utilizing the WEAI. The first essay focuses on the time allocation dimension of the WEAI. Specifically, this essay investigates a puzzling finding of the WEAI, namely that a striking number of individuals identified as inadequate in the workload indicator, referred to hereafter as 'time poor', indicate that they are satisfied with the amount of time they spend in leisure activities. This essay explores the dichotomy of 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' time poverty, arguing that only involuntary time poverty reflects disempowerment, and proposes and empirically evaluates for inclusion in future versions of the WEAI a series of involuntary time poverty measures. The second essay leverages the inclusion of male empowerment in the WEAI. Building on the observation from the WEAI pilot survey that a relatively high percentage of men are disempowered according to the WEAI, particularly in Bangladesh, this essay attempts to discern the unique aspects of male and female disempowerment through an empirical investigation of the determinants of disempowerment for each sex. The third essay recognizes that women play an important role in agricultural production, yet often face greater resource constraints than men; increasing women's empowerment can help to shrink gender resource gaps and increase agricultural productivity and food security. This essay empirically examines the links between the WEAI and agricultural productivity and household food security in Bangladesh, in order to identify where policy interventions should be directed to maximize gains in agricultural productivity and food security.

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About the WEAI

Released on February 28, 2012, the WEAI is a partnership among IFPRI, the US Government's Feed the Future initiative of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) of Oxford University. Read more about the Index here.
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