

## S.6 Measuring Women's Empowerment in Food Systems - Upholding rights and advancing equitable livelihoods through a global capacity strengthening programme on the project-level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

### **1. What, in brief, is the solution?**

This solution sees the establishment of a multi-annual and multi-partner programme of work on the project-level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI). It is an initiative (underpinned with dedicated funding) to support an alliance of organizations to use the pro-WEAI suite of tools (and its variants) to measure impacts of food systems programmes and interventions on women's empowerment. This solution sees the establishment of:

- a learning platform to share lessons and data (linking directly to the Global Food Systems Data Consortium) on what works for women's empowerment in food systems and
- a global cohort of women WEAI trainees and trainers. A training and mentorship programme for young women is envisioned as part of the global cohort.

The WEAI is the first comprehensive and standardized tool to directly measure women's empowerment and inclusion in the agricultural sector. It is an innovative tool composed of two sub-indices: one measures women's empowerment across five domains in agriculture[1], and the other measures gender parity in empowerment within the household. Accurate household-level measures and data that do not obscure gender gaps and differential vulnerabilities regarding food security and nutrition are key to an enabling environment for change. Data on women's presence in agricultural production, as actors in food value chains and markets, as users of agricultural inputs, as adopters of technologies, as managers of natural resources, as domestic carers etc. can and should be collected systematically to inform practice and policy. Our solution harnesses the capacities and agency of young women to build a global cadre of expertise in the application of the tool and will have particular emphasis on closing capacity gaps in fisheries and livestock pastoralism.

### **2. What was/were the source(s) from which this solution emerged?**

This solution has emerged from discussions within AT4 on the need for improved 'data for equity'. It is also based on historical and recent evidence around the positive food security and gender equality impacts of improved measurement of women's empowerment. The solution is also based on published learning and evidence and on the need for more solutions that address the agency of women and men in local food systems. It also emerged from discussion on the need to apply measurement of empowerment more systematically in fishery-based livelihood programmes.

### **3. What problem is it trying to address within food systems?**

There is overwhelming evidence that gender-based discrimination - or the denial of women's human rights - is one of the major causes of poverty and food and nutrition insecurity.[2] A real problem, however, is the lack of awareness and knowledge around the potential of women's empowerment to challenge discrimination and promote equality. This is partly due to the lack of capacity to accurately measure women's empowerment within institutions and programmes working in agriculture. The absence of consistency in the capture, analysis, and publication of accurate data on the gender-based dimensions of agriculture-based livelihoods is a huge system weakness. This diagnostic weakness leads to inadequate policies, and, ultimately, the failure of people's entitlement to food.[3] Creating policy or

guidance that does not thoroughly investigate and analyse power and privilege between women and men and other intersectional vulnerabilities is a major barrier to progress.

But the denial of rights and entitlements, either through social norms or through formal and informal institutions and laws, are both causes and consequences of our problem. The widespread and systematic institutional discrimination and bias against women in access to assets, services and information such as land; credit and other financial products and services; education, training and extension; employment opportunities; mobility; climate and market information; agricultural inputs and technologies can thus be attributed to the absence or weakness of data-driven policy making. When measuring the impacts of agricultural programs, the tendency is to focus on production and income. However, agricultural projects affect intrahousehold dynamics and improve (or worsen) the empowerment of individual household members. Further, sex and age matter in terms of how people experience crisis. Evidence clearly and overwhelmingly reflects that there are often significant differences in experiences of humanitarian crises in terms of access to essential, life-saving services based on a person's sex/gender and age. When agencies fail to use sex and age disaggregated data and/or gender and generational analyses, their interventions can be misguided, fail or put vulnerable groups at risk.[4][5]

#### **4. Why is addressing that problem important for achieving the goal of your Action Track?**

Action Track 4 is focused on advancing equitable livelihoods. This then means that mechanisms that promote increased agency among excluded or marginalized people, including women, are required. The pro-WEAI is an established, tested and proven tool for the advancement of the agency and power of women in agriculture and, as such, its promotion is critical to the success of AT4 and the wider Summit goals. Moreover, the solution contributes to the achievement of SDG5 and several other SDG sub-indicators. In particular, the pro-WEAI[6] aims at measurement of progress at community level and therefore understanding how the agency of producers can be further strengthened.

#### **5. How can this solution address that problem (theory of change)?**

Our theory of change is based on evidence that increased empowerment of women in agriculture leads to better food security and nutrition outcomes. When women are empowered and have equal access as men to productive and financial resources, income opportunities, education and services, there is a consequent increase in agricultural output and a significant reduction in the number of poor and hungry people. An empowered woman who has access to and control over resources can influence the extent to which resources, specifically food, are allocated in the household, benefiting the health and nutrition outcomes of the entire family. If we improve the way we measure empowerment, adapt management and report on our progress, we can make immediate progress against several SDG sub-indicators and contribute to great gender equality. Our solution, by increasing the capacities of institutions to be able to apply a standard, tested and proven measurement tool, will bridge a major systems gap. The added value of our solution is that it will place the knowledge and skills in the hands of a large and diverse range of young women working in agriculture – thus ensuring sustainability, institutionalization, and scale.

#### **6. Why does this solution align to the definition and criteria for a 'game changing solution' developed by the Summit?**

This solution will result in the enhancement of the lives and livelihoods of millions of women and men in agricultural production whose livelihoods are constrained by formal and informal barriers and inequities. It will deliver against all Summit goals through its contribution to strengthening the agency of women food producers across the world. The solution is game-changing as it will deliver the impact and scale *across all Action Tracks* that the Summit seeks by reinforcing the evidence we already have around the importance of women's empowerment as a contributor to gender-equality and to more equitable livelihoods in food systems. Evidence presented below demonstrates contributions of enhancement measurement of empowerment to improved consumption (AT1), healthier diets (AT2), sustainable production (AT3) and resilience to climate change and crises (AT.5).

## **7. Existing evidence supporting the argument that this solution will work/achieve initial outcomes**

This solution will drive the evidence base that will continue to influence policy and practice change. There is comprehensive and extensive evidence that women's empowerment, beyond its intrinsic value of building the confidence and capacities of women and men to lead fulfilling, safe and dignified lives, has multiples other benefits. This solution will amplify and scale out these successes:

- The agricultural productivity of women has direct implications on income as well as on the food security of their households. Increased income for women is associated with greater food consumption and improved nutritional status of household members.[7]
- A cluster-randomized controlled trial conducted in Burkina Faso to assess the effect of women's empowerment on reducing wasting and improving anaemia among children of 3-12 months, showed that interventions, particularly spousal communication contributed to reductions in stunting[8] and a women's empowerment study in Nepal, which measured project outcomes against 3 WEAI indicators found significant associations between women's empowerment and increased child nutrition.[9]
- Inclusive engagement and education of women and men in sustainable and nutrition-sensitive agriculture improves household nutrition by increasing access to diverse, nutrient-rich diets.[10]
- Women's empowerment is a pathway to improved nutrition because of the positive association between women's empowerment and child and maternal health[11] and, because women spend on food and education, the enhancement of women's control over production and income strengthens food security.[12]
- Equitable engagement of women and men in adaptation to climate change and natural resource governance enhances environmental outcomes, soil and water conservation and productivity.[13]
- Women's land ownership is linked to income growth, greater bargaining power within their households, better child nutrition and higher educational attainment for girls.[14]
- Biodiversity and conservation interventions that adopt gender and social inclusion strategies are associated with increases in dietary diversity[15] and women's empowerment is also associated with increased production diversity.[16]
- Empowering women by engaging men in sharing caregiving responsibilities and control over productive assets and allowing participation in household decisions leads to increased leadership among women and lower levels of gender-based violence.[17]

## **8. What is the current and/or likely political support for this idea?**

There is a widespread and growing recognition of the need for action and investment by governments and all development partners in the empowerment of women in agriculture. Commitment to SDG5 is high and many donors are looking for practical ways to advance equitable livelihoods in food systems. One logical way is by investing in the measurement system and, critically, in capacities to use the tools in that measurement system. WEAI has now been used in 56 countries by 113 organizations. Given this rapid uptake and the overwhelming demand for technical support, it is a solution ripe for scaling by engaging more partners and particularly institutions that will build the capacities of young women in developing countries on the application of the tool. Accurate indices allow for transparency and accountability; they allow for policy actions and institutional changes to have analytical basis; they are entry points for reform, and they allow for better information exchange and knowledge management. Most importantly for AT4, this solution with this index will allow for systematic capacity strengthening of institutions and partners that can drive food systems towards more just and equitable outcomes.

### **9. Are there certain contexts for which this solution is particularly well suited, or, not well-suited?**

The action proposed can be implemented globally but will be particularly required and most beneficial in places where food systems lack support structures and networking opportunities for small-scale farmers. Further, the solution can have higher and faster equity returns where women and marginalised communities face compound vulnerabilities due to, for example, poor governance.

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[1] *The five domains of empowerment in agriculture: decisions about agricultural production; access to and decision-making power about productive resources; control of use of income; leadership in the community and time allocation*

[2] *FAO, 2019, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*

[3] *IDS, 2014, Gender and Food Security: Towards Gender-Just Food and Nutrition Security*

[4] *Mazurana, D., et al, 2020 "Sex and Age Matter: Improving Humanitarian Response in Emergencies." Feinstein International Center, Tufts University*

[5] *CARE, 2020, Where are the Women? The Conspicuous Absence of Women in COVID-19 Response Teams and Plans, and Why We Need Them*

[6] *Hazel Malapit, Agnes Quisumbing, Ruth Meinzen-Dick, Greg Seymour, Elena M. Martinez, Jessica Heckert, Deborah Rubin, Ana Vaz, Kathryn M. Yount, 2019, Development of the project-level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (pro-WEAI), World Development*

[7] *FAO, 2019, The State of Food Insecurity and Nutrition in the World*

[8] *Heckert, J., et al, 2019, Is women's empowerment a pathway to improving child nutrition outcomes in a nutrition-sensitive agriculture program? Evidence from a randomized controlled trial in Burkina Faso*

[9] *Cunningham, K., et al, 2015, Women's empowerment in agriculture and child nutritional status in rural Nepal*

[10] *FAO, 2017, Nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems in practice. Options for intervention*

[11] *Malapit et al., 2015, cited in CGIAR, 2017, CGIAR Research Program on Fish Agri-Food Systems, Gender Strategy*

[12] *Agarwal, B., 2018, Gender equality, food security and the sustainable development goals (child survival, nutrition and health are notably better if the mother has assets and income, than if the father alone has the same)*

[13] *CARE, 2019, Gender Transformative Adaptation: From Good Practice to better policy*

[14] Markham, S., 2015, *The Four Things You Need to Know about Women's Land Rights*. IFPRI

[15] Skinner, A., et al, 2019, *Social Outcomes of the CARE-WWF Alliance in Mozambique: Research Findings from a Decade of Integrated Conservation and Development Programming*

[16] Malapit, H., et al, 2013, *Women's Empowerment in Agriculture, Production Diversity, and Nutrition: Evidence from Nepal*

[17] Africa Center for Gender, Social Research and Impact Assessment, 2021, *Costs and Benefits of Applying a Gender-Transformative Approach in Agriculture Programming: A Win-Win for Gender, Agriculture and Nutrition*

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