



## **A Roadmap for Measuring Agency and Social Norms in Women's Economic Empowerment**

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## Executive Summary

This Roadmap aims to provide guidance to the operationalization and measurement of Agency and Social Norms as relates to Women's Economic Empowerment. The process of developing this Roadmap involved a review of theories of empowerment across multiple disciplines including economics, psychology and political science among others. The review helped in consolidating concepts and underpinnings across disciplines to develop a comprehensive framework to guide the measurement of Agency and Social Norms in Women's Economic Empowerment.

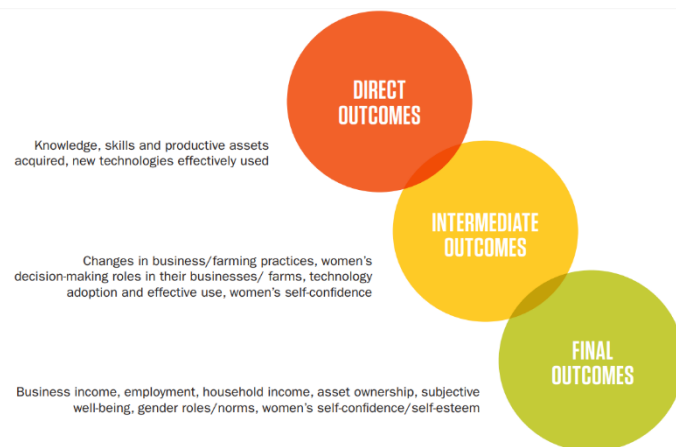
The conceptual framework presented in the Roadmap proposes an Empowerment Process that applies for Individuals and Collectives and comprises of several steps of Empowerment. The process starts with individuals or collectives *Gaining critical consciousness* of their choices beyond what the power structure allows or states to be acceptable, which leads to their *Aspiration of change*, selection of choice and goal setting, followed by their efficacy to act and actual action (i.e., agency), with these acts of *Agency* ideally resulting in achievement of their goals. Agency, in this process, is described the triad of *Can-Act-Resist* with the self-efficacy and capacities of the individuals or collectives (Can) helping them to take actions (Act) towards achieving their goals. The Empowerment Process recognizes that such actions will be met by *External Response or Backlash* which can be negative in the form of violence or suppression or positive in the form of support or encouragement from allies. The process then leads to individuals or collectives reacting (Resist) to such external responses which helps them in progressing towards achieving their desired goals. The framework further provides guidance on the Internal Attributes such as Psychology of collectives or individuals and External Contexts such as social structures, institutions and community level factors that affect all stages of the empowerment process. The framework also identifies the key role played by Social Norms in influencing all aspects of the Empowerment Process and pays special attention to its role of social norms in measurement of Women's Economic Empowerment.

The Roadmap also identifies measures of Agency and Social Norms around Women's Economic Empowerment. These measures were identified through a rigorous process of scoping interviews, review of key documents and a review of economic empowerment measures. This process led to the identification of existing high-quality measures on Agency and Social Norms and helped in identification of key areas where there is a gap in availability of good measures that can be used at scale. This led to the development of a comprehensive strategy for measures that are ready to go to scale, promising measures that need testing and areas where new measures are needed to be developed. The Roadmap proposes a three-tier strategy to address these challenges and advance the field through evidence-based measures of Agency and Social Norms in Women's Economic Empowerment.

## Background

Evidence documents the value of women and girls' empowerment as a means of improving global health and development (1). Correspondingly, much work has been done to outline how and what to measure in areas of women and girls' empowerment (2,3), yet availability of data on indicators at scale lags global goals and strategy to monitor changes in these indicators (3). Certainly, part of this is because of inadequate inclusion of these types of indicators in our multi-country surveys (e.g., LSMS, DHS), but also because fields are not aligned on conceptual framing of empowerment to ensure we approach measures the same way. In 2017, the EMERGE project was funded to advance the science of measurement of gender equality and empowerment, with the goal of supporting greater recognition and use of high quality validated measures to highlight progress and need on issues of gender equality and empowerment across the following dimensions: social, psychological, social, economic, legal, political, household and family, and environment (4). Since initiation of this project, the EMERGE platform has reviewed and created open access to more than 300 measures of gender equality and empowerment with data on reliability and validity. However, often we find that awareness and use of these measures can be discipline specific, depending on the dimension of focus.

In the case of measuring women's economic empowerment, for example, much of this work has come from the discipline of economics. Consequently, measures of focus are typically specific to women's financial autonomy and productivity, as well as the gender norms and internal capacities of women (e.g., self-efficacy, self-confidence) to achieve financial autonomy and productivity (2). [See Figure 1.]



*Figure 1 Examples of Direct, Intermediate and Final Women's Economic Empowerment. Figure taken from UN Foundation and Exxon Mobile Report, Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment, 2015 (2).*

There is also strong and increasing documentation of the ways gender norms and inequalities in domestic labor responsibilities and childbearing affect women's economic empowerment (4,5). To that end, theoretical underpinnings from other social science disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and political science, may be useful in expanding consideration of constructs for measurement. The foundation of this work should be on how to conceptualize empowerment for measurement. Hence, we offer the following to advance our thinking and action on measuring women's economic empowerment:

1. Review of Theories of Empowerment from across Disciplines
2. A conceptual framework to operationalize and measure empowerment
3. Identifying measures of Agency and Social Norms in Women's Economic Empowerment
4. Recommendations for evidence-based measures of agency and social norms in Women's Economic Empowerment

## 1. Review of Theories of Empowerment from across Disciplines

As highlighted in our 2017 EMERGE report on theoretical foundations (4), empowerment is both a process and an outcome, where the more vulnerable and marginalized individual or group builds consciousness of and agency against demonstrated discrimination in order to create change in circumstance or structure, allowing their free strategic life choices (7-17). Malhotra further adds that household dynamics are part of these inputs into women and girls' empowerment, given the centrality of women's roles as mother and homemaker as justification for lesser positioning (16). Kabeer's work in this area has received much attention and highlights the constructs and process of the empowerment process-- from critical consciousness to goal setting, to agency and action, and finally, to self-realization of goals. Much of this work has come from the discipline of development economics and builds on Sen's Capabilities Approach (18), which emphasizes "a person's functioning and capabilities: what he or she is able to do or be (e.g. the ability to be well-nourished, to avoid escapable morbidity, to take part in the life of the community." Accordingly, more recent and quantitatively focused work in this area emphasizes the importance of assets, opportunities and resources in supporting the human capabilities and empowerment process (9), but we find that these assets, opportunities and resources are inputs that can affect empowerment but are not in and of themselves empowerment. Rather, Kabeer's definition resonates as constructs of empowerment, as a process and an outcome, for individuals and groups.

The field of psychology further expands on our understanding of empowerment by focusing on capacities rather than capabilities. Capacity is the ability of the individual or group that exists at present, where capability refers to the ability that the individual or group could achieve under the right conditions. Hence, where development economics has focused on structural factors of influence that can help shift capability (the possibility to achieve action) to capacity (existing ability to achieve action), Rappaport's work on psychological empowerment emphasizes the states and traits of the individual or group (e.g., perceived helplessness, group cohesion) as affecting capacity to gain mastery or empowerment over their circumstances (19,20). For that reason, emphasis is on the internal attributes and cognitions of individuals and groups. At the individual level, research from Bandura and Menon, from social and organizational psychology respectively, demonstrates that self-efficacy, perceived control, goal internalization, and self-regulation related to the behavioral goal are key elements of empowerment, and directly linked to behaviors serving as acts of agency to achieve one's goals (21-22). Zimmerman expands on this by considering the group or collective, highlighting the importance of intragroup aspects of collective empowerment and the individual cognitive and behavioral characteristics of group engagement and participation in influencing collective agency, in terms of both organizing and collective action (23-24). This work has been applied to civic participation and political empowerment (24), which focuses on a disadvantaged group increasing political voice and representation via individual-level cognitive beliefs that they can participate and their participation can enact desired change and collective organizing to participant in sufficient numbers for impact (25). These perspectives from psychology add to Kabeer's definition by emphasizing the cognitive-behavioral aspects of the empowerment process (e.g. self-efficacy, goal internalization and conviction) as well as the roles of inter- and intra-group dynamics in affecting the process, with the latter being inputs (as was the case above with assets, resources, and opportunities). Importantly, as noted above psychology also theorizes the role of cognitive-behavioral

states and traits of the individual or group that feed into the empowerment process, factors we can view as internal attributes (19, 20).

As can be seen in the definitions of empowerment from the disciplines of economics, psychology and political science, central to this concept is recognition of social marginalization as the context in which empowerment occurs. In fact, the ways a power structure/authority socially marginalizes individual or groups requires empowerment on the part of the marginalized individual or group to achieve self-determination. Friere's work in education take this approach and, like that discussed above in development economics, defines empowerment as a process of self-actualization -- moving from being an object where others determine your actions or opportunities, to becoming a subject with agency to enact change on your life and achieve your self-determined goals (25). Friere posits that the oppressed must first gain critical consciousness of their oppression and the unjustness of it, and then they must guide their own process of empowerment, rather than have it defined by allies or supporters outside of the oppressed group. Otherwise the oppressed remain objects and are denied true agency. This work was heavily influenced by Karl Marx, whose research and theoretical writings explored the roles of capitalism and modernization in creating class conflicts, documenting how and why class oppression can incite violence (26). He theorizes that when the oppressed inevitably resist against those with power over them and seek power to achieve their self-determined goals, power structures will retaliate against this resistance (26). Durkheim, another founder of sociology, also emphasized the role of social positioning in health and well-being, and highlighted that norms and institutions are the key elements in society that marginalize groups (27). In contrast to Marx, he emphasized that social well-being for all is achievable via social solidarity, cohesion, and stability, and does not require violent resistance on the part of the oppressed for social change to occur (27). Growing research on social networks and social cohesion offer opportunity for evidence to support this perspective (28). Hence, again we see from the disciplines of education and sociology a similar emphasis on empowerment as a process beginning with critical consciousness and moving toward autonomy and self-actualization. However, here we find a more central focus on external power structures – in particular, norms and institutions – that affect it, as well as the dynamic interaction between the oppressed and those in power when acts of agency and resultant retaliation occur.

## 2. A conceptual framework to Operationalize and Measure empowerment

Based on the review of empowerment theories, we find that there is much uniformity across disciplines regarding the process of empowerment. We assimilate these theories in a core model for the empowerment process, featured in Figure 2.

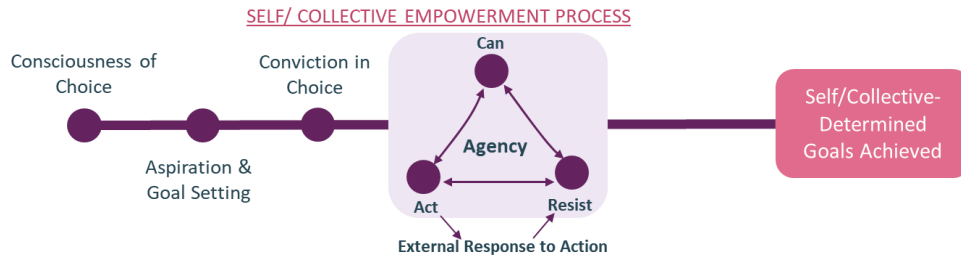


Figure 2: The Empowerment Process for Individuals and Collectives

The steps of empowerment are as follows:

- *Gain Consciousness of Choice*, for a choice beyond what you are allowed or expected based on social characteristics such as gender.
- *Aspire and Goal Set One's Choice*, creating a plan for how achieve it.
- *Feel Conviction in that Choice*, as there may be many barriers or costs to working toward the choice, it is reasonable to vacillate in the decision. Acting on the choice is easier when you have confidence in the choice you are making.
- *Use Your Agency* to act on your choice and achieve self-determined goals. Agency can result in *backlash* or retaliation from those with power over you, and *resistance* from you in the face of backlash.
- *Achieve Your Self-Determined Goals* and gain self-determination and self-actualization

*While this process looks linear, it is not.* An individual or collective can engage in agency without fully holding conviction in choice, or they may have consciousness of choice but not wish to engage in that choice. Additionally, the individual or collective may engage in acts of agency, receive backlash for their efforts (punishment or retaliation) from external forces, and fall back to a place where they no longer perceive of choices beyond what those in power allows. Alternatively, they may find external support for their acts of agency, facilitating their agency to result in achievement of their self-determined goals. Importantly, this model also posits that individuals and collectives are increasingly empowered by traversing through the stages of the process and that completion of all the stages is not necessary to be empowered.

### Agency as Can-Act-Resist

We expand focus on how to measure agency by highlighting its elements as Can-Act-Resist. (Figure 3):

- *Can* is the actors' capacities or efficacy (self-efficacy or collective efficacy) to engage in actions against or inconsistent with the power structure; these can be perceived or actual efficacy, as both influence action. Efficacy or control over resources or assets would be included here.



- *Act* is the actions of individuals or collectives that are aligned to their choices and goals and may or may not be against those defined by the power structure for them. Actions can include giving voice or communicating one's goals, decision-making about issues affecting one's goals, or simply engaging in direct actions to achieve one's goals. These actions may occur with the knowledge and input from those in positions of power and authority over the actors (e.g., communication), or without the knowledge of those in position of power (e.g., covert activities)
  - When actors "*Act*", they may face *External Response*, positive or negative, to their actions from those in power or those carrying out the will of those in power (i.e., enforcers). External response can be negative, positive, or absent, as noted above. However, the nature of negative reaction is complex, and can include punishment, suppression, or discrediting.
- *Resist* is a consequence of negative external response, when actors continue to act despite the backlash they face. Here, as with "*Act*," resistance behaviors can be with or outside of the knowledge of those with power over the actor. However, when resistance involves engagement with someone with power or authority over the action, bargaining/negotiation is required, and may mean giving up something of value.

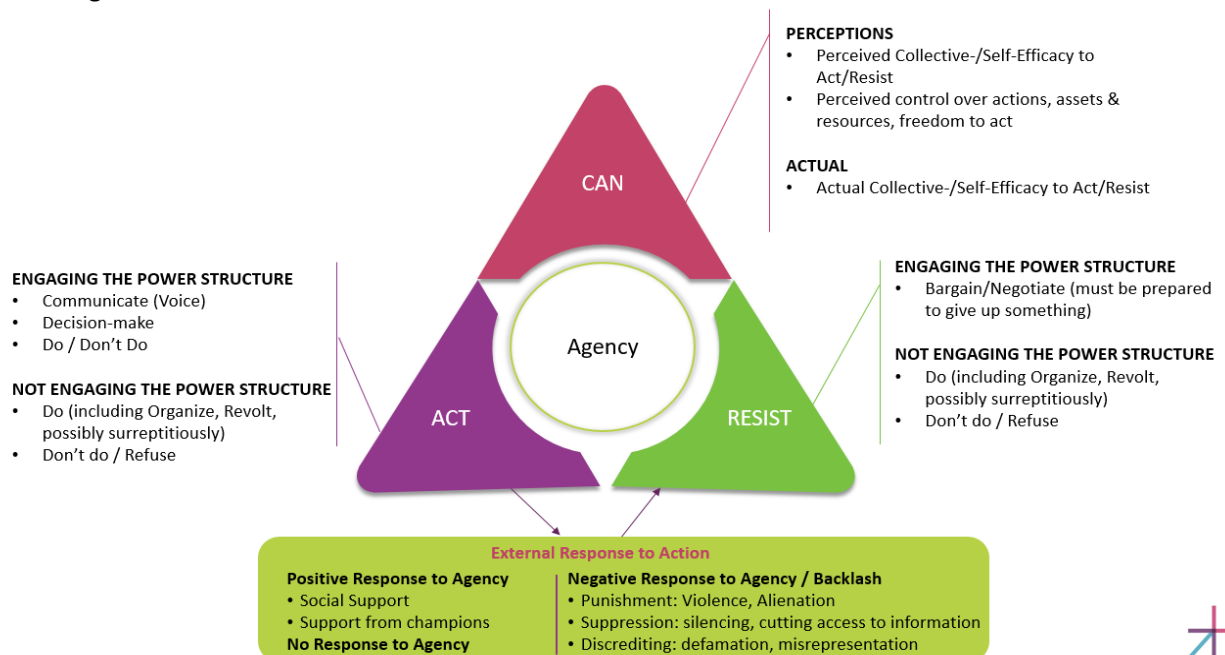


Figure 3: Agency as Can-Act-Resist

### Focus on Measuring Inputs into the Empowerment Process

As seen in Figure 4, and as noted in our above described theoretical foundations, there are many inputs into the empowerment process, and these can facilitate or impede that process.

- *Internal Attributes* of the individual or group: a) the psychology of the individual or collective and b) the intra-group dynamics of the collective

Internal attributes can either facilitate or inhibit the empowerment process. They include psychological attributes of the individual or collective and intra-group dynamics of the collective. Psychological attributes of the individual or collective can act as facilitators when they involve less restrictive attitudes or beliefs, knowledge of choices, positive internal affect (e.g. optimism, trust, empathy) and psychological resilience (e.g., coping, intrinsic motivation). A lack of these attributes, however, can act as inhibitors to the process. Similarly, intra-group dynamics such as cohesion, consensus building, social support etc. can

act as facilitators of the empowerment process for collectives, where the absence of or weakness in these can inhibit collective empowerment. Internal attributes influence each stage in the empowerment process. For example, at an individual level, knowledge and awareness effects consciousness of choice. Less restrictive attitudes and beliefs can inform aspiration and goal setting. Positive internal affect can influence conviction in choice and actions and psychological resilience can help individuals resist external power structures.

- *External Context* of the individual or group: a) social structures and institutions of the individual or collective, b) community and household factors of the individual or collective, and c) the intergroup dynamics of the collective

Like internal attributes, external context can also facilitate or inhibit the empowerment process. Borrowing from our multidisciplinary theory analysis of empowerment, we find external factors of influence on empowerment fall into the following realms: social structures and institutions in which individuals and collectives operate, more proximal community and household dynamics of the individuals and collectives, and inter-group dynamics for collectives. As described in our theory review, the fields of sociology and political science highlight the importance of external structures and policies that can facilitate or impede empowerment. A more unified and empathetic society, with social protections and security, trusted and stable political and legal spaces, and low or no corruption in the political sphere as well in public services and programs can support empowerment, including political and social empowerment of marginalized groups. In contrast, more atomized societies, characterized by conflict, instability, distrust in social and government systems, and widespread corruption not only compromises well-being of societies, it also impedes empowerment of the marginalized and in fact may very well foster greater backlash against acts of empowerment. The more immediate environment of community and household also affect empowerment, as it is here where assets, resources, and opportunity structures may be available, and where household dynamic may be fostering of women and girls' consciousness of choice and agency. Intergroup dynamics also influence whether a collective can effectively act and achieve goals, depending on whether they have connections and alliances with other collectives, or positive recognition by those with power over them. We can view these external sets of factors as influencing each other, even as they influence the individual or collective actors of empowerment, in accordance with Ecological Systems Theory (30). Hence, while the model looks fairly linear in Figure 4, it operates under multiple layers of influence – societal, community and family, collective, and individual, and the inner layers (e.g., individual and collective) can influence family, community, and society, just as these layers influence them and each other.

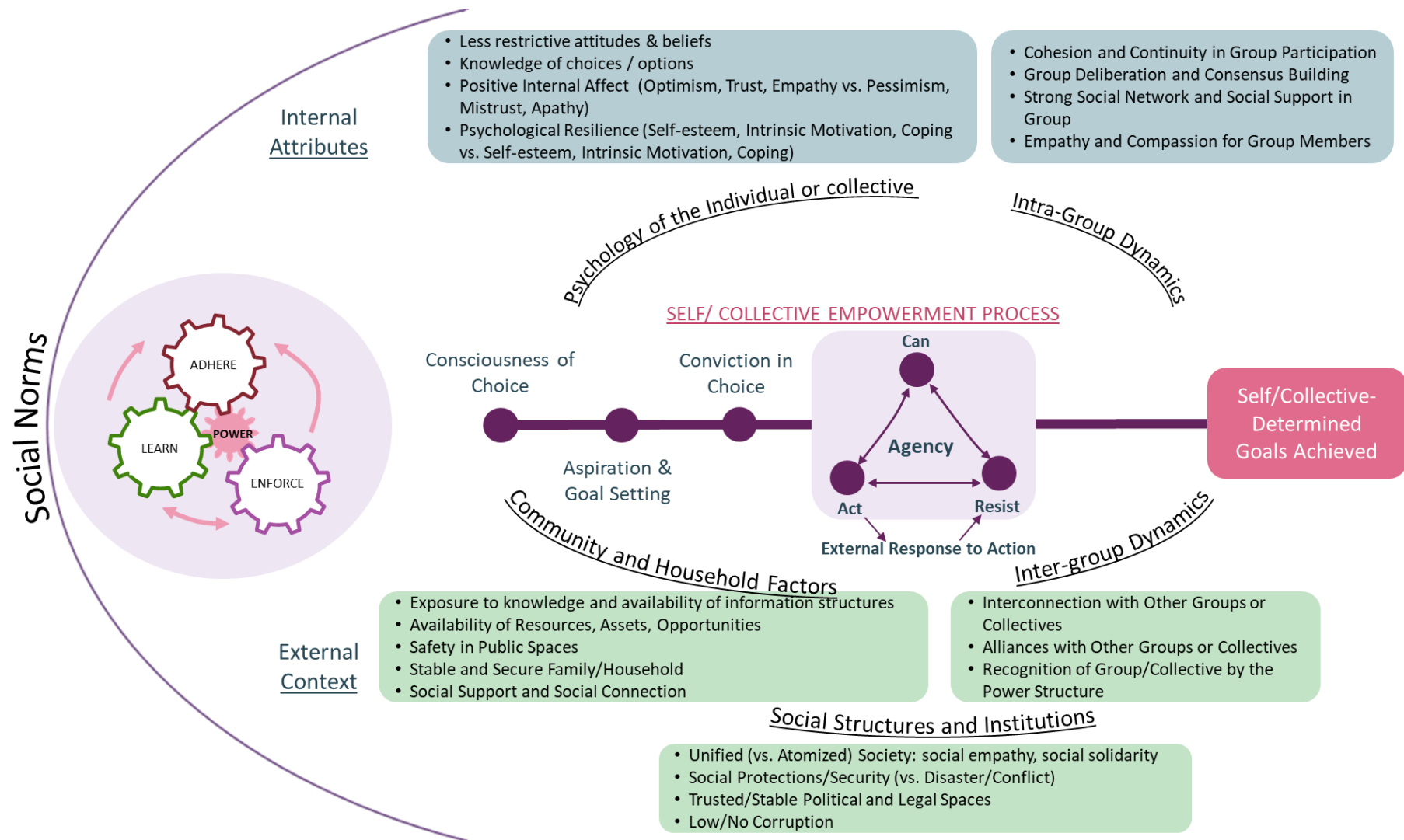


Figure 4: Conceptual Model for Measuring the Empowerment Process and Inputs Affecting It

**Note:** While the model highlights the role of internal attributes and external contexts as inputs into the empowerment process, it is crucial to note that **empowerment of individuals and collectives has the potential to influence the internal attributes and transform external contexts and norms as well**. Hence, the empowerment process itself can result in alteration not only of the individual or collective seeking empowerment, but also to the external context- institutions and norms – surrounding them. This model only focuses on positive attributes and contexts which act as facilitators in the empowerment process. Negative attributes and contexts will act as barriers.

## Social Norms as Learn-Adhere-Enforce

*Social Norms* encompass the individual, collective, and external environment (societal, community and family). Individuals live their lives as members of communities influenced by social factors, including social norms, and by broader environmental factors.

Social norms influence and uphold behavior and reinforce social inequities. Social norms affect the core empowerment process directly through consciousness of choice, aspiration and goal setting and conviction, as well as by shaping internal attributes and external context that in turn facilitate or constrain empowerment. Social norms refer to the informal rules, often unspoken and unwritten, that govern which behaviors are appropriate within a given group (31-33). They are the rules that govern a behavior, not the behavior itself. Social norms that are perceptions of typical behavior, or expectations about what people do, are called descriptive norms. Perceptions of what others consider appropriate, or expectations about what people should do, are called injunctive norms (31). Norms exist within a complex web of culture, influenced by belief systems, embedded in formal and informal institutions and produced through social interactions (34).

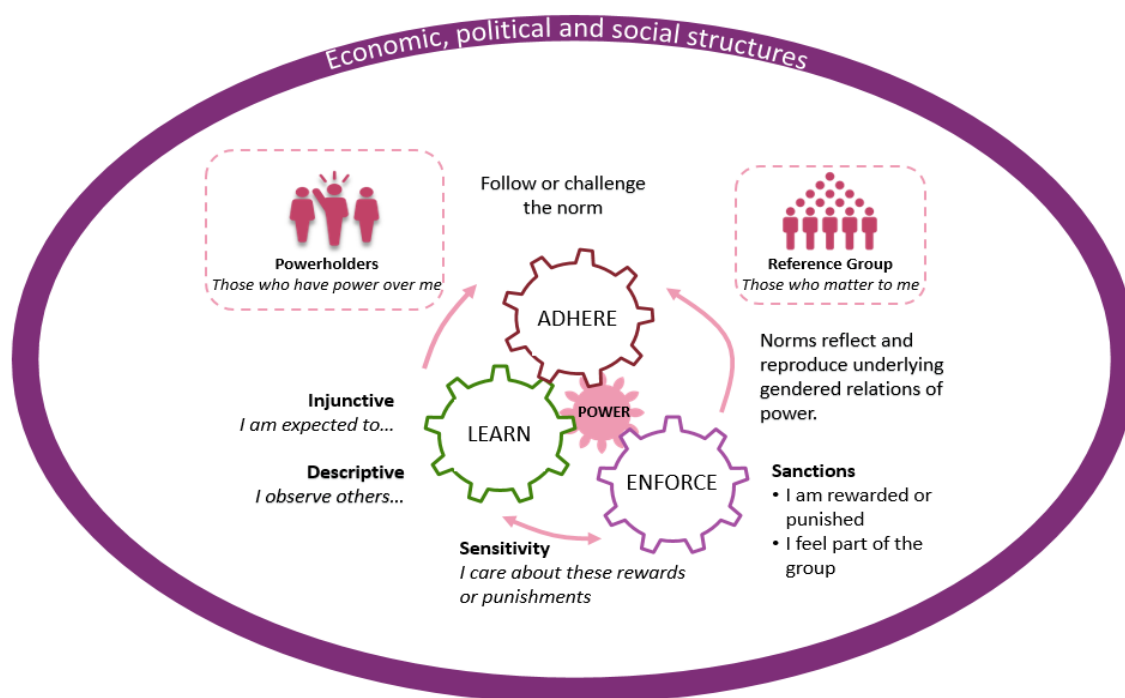


Figure 5: Conceptual Model for Measuring Social Norms: Learn-Adhere-Enforce

To operationalize social norms into measurable constructs, we use the **Learn-Adhere-Enforce** framework, as shown in Figure 5:

- *Power* is at the core of social norms because they reflect and reproduce underlying gendered relations of power (35). Hierarchies of power in groups and communities ensure that power holders benefit from the status quo. Power holders often enforce compliance with social norms that uphold their power and privilege and resist normative shifts.

- *Learn* happens from infancy throughout the life cycle as individuals observe how others behave and internalize social expectations. These socialization mechanisms align with categorization of norms into descriptive and injunctive norms (see above).
  - *Descriptive*: Perceptions of what people do or what “I observe others” doing
  - *Injunctive*: Perceptions of what people do or the understanding of what “I am expected to” do or “I should do” according to others.
- *Adhere* follows learning of social norms, where the individual either complies with or challenges the norm. People who challenge norms or do not comply under specific circumstances are often referred to as changemakers or positive deviants. Individuals may comply with a norm because they do not have the wherewithal to challenge it, fear negative sanctions or seek benefit or rewards, such as social approval for compliance.
- *Enforcement* of a norm is carried out through *sanctions* (rewards or punishments) for adhering to or deviating from a social norm. Some follow a norm because they want to demonstrate group membership.
- *Sensitivity* to sanctions determines how well they work. The degree to which individuals care about the rewards or punishments tied to adherence to a norm may influence their behavior.
- *Strength* of a norm can be assessed by measuring people’s expectations of the social consequences (sanctions or rewards) of complying with or deviating from a norm. The strength of a norm may be a useful indicator of how amenable it is to change.
- *Powerholders* are those who have “power over” the actor, while the *reference group* is defined as people whose opinion or behavior matters for a behavior or context (32, 36). A reference group may include individuals who enforce behaviors through rewards or punishment, or individuals who serve as role models. They are the group individuals turn to for guidance on the social rules for a given behavior. Norms are typically sustained by more than one reference group, and their influence may have different weight or even go in different directions.

### 3. Identifying Measures of Agency and Norms on Women's Economic Empowerment

To apply the concepts of our measurement framework on empowerment, and specifically the role of agency and norms, for measurement of women's economic empowerment, we first focus on the key constructs of agency and social norms described above. For agency, this emphasized the constructs related to *Can-Act-Resist*, as outlined in Figure 3, and inclusive of potential external responses to agency – positive and negative. For social norms, this emphasized the constructs related to *Learn-Adhere-Enforce*, with consideration for social sanctions – positive and negative – used to reinforce norms, as well as individual or collective sensitivity to these sanctions. While we had clarity on these constructs based on our measurement framework, we did not have specificity of these constructs as applied to economic empowerment. To that end, we engaged in three separate but intersecting processes to identify the areas of economic empowerment to which we could apply assessment of the agency and norms constructs: scoping interviews, document review, and measures review.

1. Scoping Interviews (37 interviews) were conducted in October 2019 with 39 experts recruited from academia, multi-lateral organizations and non-governmental organizations working in the area of gender equality and women's economic empowerment. These experts were largely economists or gender development researchers. We asked them their definitions of agency and norms in women's economic empowerment, measurable constructs, and areas where best evidence measures exist and where they feel there is most need to address gaps in measures.
2. Review of key documents from foundations and donor organizations working on Women's Economic Empowerment, including those from the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#) and the [Hewlett Foundation](#). We also reviewed key reports and documents on measurement of women's economic empowerment from [UN Foundation](#), [Center for Global Development](#), [World Bank](#), [GrOW](#), [ICRW](#), the [SEEP Network](#), [DCED](#), and [J-PAL](#). While we do not include citations for the expansive review of papers conducted to identify potential constructs, we do hyperlink key documents from each organization.
3. Review of economic empowerment measures from our [EMERGE website](#) as on March 10, 2020, to assess key areas of focus and categorization of existing validated measures our team has identified via our reviews of the literature and inputs from experts.

Based on the above exercises, we identified the following key areas of economic empowerment for focus:

- Unpaid Care and Domestic Responsibilities
- Financial Inclusion and Financial Autonomy
- Business, Agriculture, Market Participation, Enterprise, and Entrepreneurship
- Educational Attainment and Training
- Livelihood, Employment and Labor Force Participation
- Access to Economic Resources and Social capital
- Access to Digital Technologies
- Mobility, Safety and Freedom of Movement
- Political/Civic Participation and Community Engagement
- Reproductive and Family Planning Autonomy

Using these areas of economic empowerment, we created matrices to assess availability of measures in these areas for each agency and norms construct. We identified measures of economic empowerment from the [EMERGE website](#) as of March 10, 2020, inclusive of the above areas of interest, and classified these by construct, to create heat maps highlighting areas where measures are more and less available. In addition, we also included measures that did not meet EMERGE criteria but were recommended by experts. To identify measures on the EMERGE platform, we did not limit ourselves to the Economic dimension, given the broader areas included in our above noted analysis. We searched across dimensions (e.g., Health, Social, Psychological Legal) and identified 214 measures on women's economic empowerment for review. Items in each measure were reviewed by 2 researchers independently and measures unrelated to agency or norms were dropped from further analysis. Two independent coders then reviewed the measures to categorize them for heat mapping, to identify where measures exist and where gaps persist, by construct and area of empowerment. Subsequently, the two measures again reviewed the measures for quality and brevity, to identify best evidence measures for recommendation. We provide more detail on analysis and results of our heat mapping of agency and norms measures of economic empowerment in the next sections.

## Findings on Measurement of Agency in Women's Economic Empowerment

### *Heat map of Measures on Agency in Women's Economic Empowerment*

The first level of review of measures involved two coders independently coding the 214 measures on women's economic empowerment identified from our first level of review of measures. Coders reviewed measures to determine whether they were related to agency and what area of economic empowerment they measured. Based on this level of review 112 measures were identified as not being related to any construct related to agency and were dropped from further analysis. The remaining 102 measures were then heat mapped based on the area of economic empowerment they cover. Heat mapping allows for display of both constructs of agency covered by existing measures and areas of economic empowerment covered by existing measures.

*Table 1: Heat map of measures of Agency in Women's Economic Empowerment*

Constructs		Unpaid Care, Domestic Work within Household	Financial Inclusion and Financial Autonomy	Business, Agriculture, Market Participation, Enterprise & Entrepreneurship	Educational Attainment and Training	Livelihood, Employment & Labor Force Participation	Access to Economic Resources & Social Capital	Access to digital technologies	Mobility, Safety & Freedom of Movement	Political Participation & Community Engagement	Reproductive & Family Planning Autonomy
CAN	Perceived Collective/Self-Efficacy to Act/Resist	0	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	1
	Actual Collective/Self-Efficacy to Act/Resist (Includes Freedom to Act and Control over Action/Assets/Resources)	0	2	2	1	0	1	3	2	3	3
ACT	Communication/Voice - with power structure	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	Do (including Organize, Decision-make, possibly covertly) or Don't Do/Refuse	23	22	21	2	22	8	4	5	12	6
RESIST	Bargain/Negotiate (must be prepared to give up something)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Do (including Organize, Revolt, possibly surreptitiously) or Don't Do/Refuse	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

As seen in Table 1, our heat map on agency measures in women’s economic empowerment indicates that most measures are related to action, and specifically to decision-making, particularly in the areas of domestic work, financial inclusion and autonomy, enterprise, and livelihoods. Closer examination of these measures reveals that often these measures are just indicative of whether women were involved in decision-making, but less information is available about her choice to be or not be involved, or whether there would be negative response if she attempted to engage in the decision-making. Responses to acts of agency and resultant resistance to negative responses to agency were almost non-existent in our reviewed measures. We also found fewer measures in the areas of access to digital resources, freedom of movement, and educational attainment and training for economic empowerment opportunities, important enablers for the areas of economic empowerment that received greater focus: financial inclusion, enterprise, and livelihoods.

### ***Identification of Best-Evidence Agency in Economic Empowerment Measures at Scale***

While the number of identified measures on agency in women’s economic empowerment appears to be very promising, the existence of these measures does not guarantee their quality or ease of use. Central to supporting an increase in access to data on women’s economic empowerment at scale, for monitoring of national and global progress on this important indicator, is availability of a good measure for use at scale.

To that end, we conducted an additional level of review of our heat mapped agency measures. Two independent coders again reviewed the 102 identified measures on agency in women’s economic empowerment, but this time scored them on the following features:

1. **Psychometrics:** Psychometric testing of measures provides information on the reliability and validity of that measure. We review and score all measures on the EMERGE on their psychometric properties including internal reliability, content validity, criterion validity, and construct validity, provided those data are available. Measures are scored based on their psychometric evidence categorized as High (> 66.66%), Medium (33.33% - 66.66%) or Low (< 33.33%), based on the psychometric test results of the measure. Detailed methodology on the EMERGE scoring procedure is available on the platform (37). Surveys conducted with population representative samples at national or cross-national levels, or at subnational levels, are included on the EMERGE platform, but are noted as having “No Data” if psychometric data are unavailable. For this exercise, we scored all agency measures using a 4-point scale, where “4” indicated a high EMERGE score, “3” indicated a medium EMERGE score, and “2” indicated a low EMERGE score. Measures with no psychometric data available on Emerge were assigned a value of 1.
2. **Cross-national Use:** We also document cross-national use of measures on the EMERGE website. We reviewed all measures and categorized them on a 3-point scale, based on if they were tested across multiple nations or multiple world regions. If measure was tested in a single country only, we assigned it a score of “1”. Measures that were tested in multiple countries but not multiple world regions<sup>1</sup> were assigned a score of “2”, and measures tested across multiple world-regions were assigned a score of “3”.

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<sup>1</sup> World regions were identified based on World Bank’s classification of world regions: <https://data.worldbank.org/country>



3. **Brevity:** Measures at scale are typically captured in large surveys inclusive of items across a variety of areas, and thus any one construct of focus must be brief to be included in these large surveys. Hence, we also scored measures on brevity, using a 3-point scale. Measures with more than 10 items were assigned a score of “1”; measures between 6 and 10 items were assigned a score of “2”, and measures with 5 items or less were assigned a score of “3”.
4. **Focus on Women’s Economic Empowerment:** Some measures included in our review were not exclusively focused on women’s economic empowerment. Hence, we also scored measures based on their central focus on economic empowerment, using a 5-point scale. The scoring procedure was as follows: All or almost all items = “5”, Most / more than half of the items = “4”, Around half of the items = “3”, Few / less than half of the items = “2”, Very few items = “1”.

We then added the scores of the individual parameters to get a total score, weighting scores more heavily on psychometrics and focus on women’s economic empowerment. We then classified all measures as scoring “Low” (Score 1 to 5), “Medium” (Score 6 to 10) and “High” (Score 11 to 14), to identify those measures of agency in women’s economic empowerment we could best recommend for use at scale. Overall, 7 measures were classified as High and are listed in Table 2 below:

Table 2: List of high scoring measures of Agency in Women’s Economic Empowerment

- [Control over assets](#)
- [Decision Making Over Financial Assets](#)
- [Employment and Wage Equality](#)
- [Financial Resilience Measure](#)
- [Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index](#)
- [Financial Savings Measure](#)
- [Household Economic Decision Making](#)

## Findings on Measurement of Social Norms in Women’s Economic Empowerment

As was the case with the agency review, two coders independently reviewed the 214 measures on women’s economic empowerment identified from our first level of review of measures, to assess whether they related to agency and what area of economic empowerment they measured. Our analysis yielded findings that we could not easily interpret because many measures indicated by title that they assessed

Table 3: Key Social Norms terms and definitions

PRIMARILY INDIVIDUALLY OR SOCIALLY DRIVEN	TERM	DEFINITION
INDIVIDUALLY	ATTITUDE	WHAT I BELIEVE IS GOOD OR BAD, AND WHAT OUGHT TO BE
	KNOWLEDGE	WHAT I BELIEVE IS TRUE
SOCIALLY	DESCRIPTIVE (ALSO KNOWN AS EMPIRICAL EXPECTATIONS)	WHAT I BELIEVE OTHERS DO
	INJUNCTIVE (ALSO KNOWN AS NORMATIVE EXPECTATIONS)	WHAT I BELIEVE OTHERS WILL APPROVE/ DISAPPROVE OF ME DOING
	REFERENCE GROUP	PEOPLE WHOSE OPINIONS MATTER TO ME (FOR A PARTICULAR BEHAVIOR OR CONTEXT) PEOPLE WHO REWARD OR PUNISH ME FOR MY BEHAVIOR
INDIVIDUALLY & SOCIALLY	BEHAVIOR	WHAT I DO

social norms, but they assessed attitudes or knowledge. To effectively conceptualize social norms, it is helpful to consider the distinctions among: a) individual knowledge and attitudes; b) social norms, which are the generally held attitudes and behaviors occurring in the individual’s social context (i.e., what is expected); and c) individual behavior, or the actions influenced by the individual’s knowledge/attitudes and the norms in their social context. (See Table 2.) Importantly, norms also affect individual knowledge and attitudes, again highlighting the importance of the social context (38, 39).

It is important that measures assess knowledge, attitudes and behaviors in the social context of the individual. This can be done directly, from the “reference group” or those who are typical or influential in the social context (40), or indirectly from the individual of interest based on their perceptions of the reference group (41). Most often, it is easier to measure an individual’s perceptions of what is typical and approved of by their reference group (41). Hence, as seen in Figure 6, a social norm measure assessed from the individual would measure what the respondent believes others do (i.e., the *descriptive norm*), and what the respondent believes others think she/he/they would do (i.e., the *injunctive norm*).

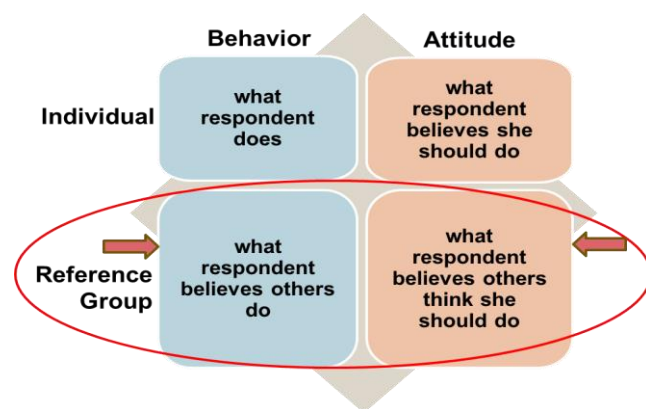


Figure 6: Key elements of Social Norms measures

Importantly, and as guided by our Learn-Enforce-Adhere framework on measurement of social norms, these injunctive and descriptive norms are not the only constructs of norms measurement. We must also measure who constitutes the *reference group* of importance for the individual (e.g., peers, community leaders) for the given behavior or attitude of interest, what *sanctions* (positive or negative responses) are perceived for adherence or non-adherence to the norm, and the *sensitivity* of the individual to the sanctions (42).

### **Heat Map of Measures on Social Norms in Women’s Economic Empowerment**

With these constructs of social norms in mind – injunctive norms, descriptive norms, sanctions, sensitivity, reference group - we reviewed our 102 measures and found only nine that were actually norms measures. As seen in Table 3, descriptive norms related to unpaid care and domestic responsibilities was the only area where we found multiple measures. Norms measures are largely absent across all areas of economic empowerment, with only unpaid care/domestic responsibilities, education attainment and training, political participation and community engagement, and family planning having any social norms measures at all.

Table 4: Heat map of measures of Social Norms for Women's Economic Empowerment

Constructs		Unpaid Care, Domestic Work within Household	Financial Inclusion and Financial Autonomy	Business, Agriculture, Market Participation, Enterprise & Entrepreneurship	Educational Attainment and Training	Livelihood, Employment & Labor Force Participation	Access to Economic Resources & Social Capital	Access to digital technologies	Mobility, Safety & Freedom of Movement	Political Participation & Community Engagement	Reproductive & Family Planning Autonomy
Social Norms	Injunctive Norm (I am expected)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Descriptive Norm (I observe)	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Sanction (Positive / Negative)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Strength / Sensitivity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Reference Group	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Our next level of review to identify strong measures of social norms on the key areas identified earlier, in our analysis of agency measures: psychometrics, cross-national testing, brevity, and focus on economic empowerment, yielded no single measures we can recommend for operationalization at scale. Of note is that this is a nascent area of study, and the grey literature suggests emerging measures that could be psychometrically tested in diverse national contexts and with diverse populations, though more appear to be coming from the area of health than women's economic empowerment, suggesting an area ripe for research.

### **Action steps for social norms measurement**

Despite the proliferation of programs that aim to shift norms and evidence of the effectiveness of this approach in altering health risk behaviours (43), there is little evidence that these programs result in shifts in norms or the impact on behaviours are due to normative shifts. This is due in part to deficits in our ability to effectively measure social norms – including how common a norm is, how strong an influence a norm has over individual behaviour, or how norms change over time. Based on the findings from the review, the following action steps are proposed to fill gaps in availability of quality measures for Social Norms related to Women's Economic Empowerment:

1. Formative research to guide measures development, for example using recently developed social norms exploration approaches.
2. Develop and test norms measures across sectors (Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health, Women's Economic Empowerment, Gender Based Violence, Nutrition)
3. Psychometric testing and publication
4. Compare measurement approaches and their power to predict behaviour

## 5. Recommendations for Evidence-Based Measures of Agency and Norms in Women's Economic Empowerment

This analysis of measures on agency and norms in women's economic empowerment highlights that there are some measures that can be taken to scale, or can be tested and adapted for use at scale, and at the same time, there remain many gaps in measurement that will impede our ability to track progress on this outcome. Hence, we highlight measures and constructs across three tiers, to move the field forward:

### Tier 1. Measures Ready to Go to Scale

Our review was able to identify 16 high quality, evidence-based measures of agency in economic empowerment that could be used at scale, and in some cases, as with the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture measure, are already being operationalized across multiple country settings. Given the renewed interest in and focus on measurement science and women's economic empowerment, we anticipate an increase in the number of these high-quality measures that we will continue to capture. For these measures, we recommend assessment of which large-scale multinational surveys include focus on issues of women's equality and empowerment and may have capacity and interest in expanding their scope of measurement to broaden coverage of agency indicators. Efforts to move this forward should include:

- Development of relationships with institutions that implement large-scale surveys, and partnership with these institutions to review measures for refinement or broadening to include items on agency.
- Create consortiums across large-scale survey groups to facilitate discussion of how to engage in complementary measurement, to expand consideration of these issues across surveys of focus, regardless of whether they are on health, labor, education, or other aspects of development.
- Listen and learn from leadership and the consortium of large-scale survey groups focused on gender equality and empowerment measures to determine the areas of focus they and their constituencies consider most important and timely, and determine how to support measurement development that is responsive.

#### Potential Partners for Large-Scale Surveys for Testing at Scale

• Afrobarometer	• Gender & Adolescence Global Evidence (GAGE)	• Multiple Indicators Cluster Surveys (MICS)
• America's Barometer by Vanderbilt	• Global Attitudes Survey	• Program for International Student Assessment for Development
• Annual Status Education Report (ASER)	• Global Barometer Survey	• Program for International Student Assessments
• Arab Barometer	• Global Early Adolescent Study	• Study on Global Ageing and Adult Health
• Asian Barometer	• Global Preferences Survey	• World Mental Health Composite International Diagnostic Interview (WHO WMH-CIDI)
• British Polling Council	• India Human Development Survey (IHDS)	• World Public Opinion
• Demographic and Health Survey	• International Social Survey Program (ISSP)	• World Values Survey
• Doing Business Survey	• Latino Barometer	• Young Lives
• Enterprise Surveys	• Living Standards Measurement Survey (including - Integrated Surveys on Agriculture)	
• Eurasia Barometer		
• European Commission Public Opinion		
• Gallup World Poll		

## **Tier 2: Promising Measures that Need Testing**

Promising measures are those that have a compelling case for use but that have not been tested in multiple countries or regions, lack clarity/brevity, and/or need additional psychometric testing, and therefore did not score highly in our scoring exercise. Promising measures should be tested further for refinement and across diverse context and populations.

- Based on our scoring exercise, we identified agency and social norms measures that did not meet the criteria for a high score but that could benefit from additional testing in the field. Promising measures of interest can be found on the [EMERGE website](#), for adaptation and local scale up.
- Institutions which focus on survey research, particularly those affiliated with research scientists and academics invested in strong research methodologies, should consider expansion of surveys via existing validated measures to document the value of these measures across populations, rather than creating new measures for each population and context. This more harmonized approach to measurement can allow for greater comparisons across geographies and populations and can also facilitate development of measures that can be taken to scale.
- Findings from field testing and adaptation of promising measures should be shared broadly, possibly via convenings at conferences or platforms such as EMERGE, to allow for greater learning on the value of existing measures for use across geographies and populations. Greater focus on publication of data inclusive of formative research and psychometric testing of measures adapted for use with more diverse populations would also help advance the field and can inform our conceptual understanding of the role of agency and social norms in the empowerment process.

## **Tier 3: Eliminating Measurement Gaps and Creating New Measures**

Our review of existing measures revealed several gaps where there are no measures for several areas of agency and almost all areas of social norms related to women's economic empowerment. Hence, there is great need to develop and test new measures where gaps persist. To achieve this, we must act as a field to:

- Continue to monitor advancements in measurement and see where measurement gaps persist, or persist for use with certain populations, to highlight ongoing gaps in the field.
- Use opportunities at conferences and meetings to engage experts with the goal of identifying consensus on priority areas for filling known gaps, as well as undertake field research opportunities to develop and test new measures that can address these gaps.
- Ensure strong measurement science is well-understood, well-utilized, well-documented and shared, by researchers working in the area of measurement development. Guidance from the [EMERGE 10 Steps to Measurement Development](#) may help, but trainings are also needed.
- Pilot new measures in multiple contexts and populations, psychometrically test the newly developed measures, and test across multiple countries. Share findings broadly.

This three-tiered system can help guide shifts from concept to testing to harmonizing to measurement at scale. At the same time, these efforts can also be used for measurement development and use for purposes of program planning and evaluation. Overall, our review of theory and measurement suggests that we have good measures and strong researchers trained in measurement science. Now we must use them to move our concepts to measurement, with the goal of improving our monitoring at scale.

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