

APPROACH OF MEASURING AND STUDYING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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©Ontario International Development Agency ISSN: 1923-6654 (print)
ISSN 1923-6662 (online). Available at <http://www.ssrn.com/link/OIDA-Intl-Journal-Sustainable-Dev.html>

Abstract: The empowerment of women is one of the vital issues of development. United Nations millennium development goal No. 3 is promote gender equality and women empowerment. In this study I will discuss the concept of women empowerment, the process of women empowerment and the measurement of women empowerment. In this paper I will explain the measurement scale of women empowerment which had been used in different literature reviews. To measure the women empowerment, I referred various dimensions. A number of items are arranged under each of dimensions. In this paper I will synthesize and list the most commonly used measurement scales of women empowerment, drawing from the frameworks developed by various authors. My review revealed a number of essential strengths in the existing effort on women's empowerment that provides the groundwork for further evolution on measurement.

Keywords: MFI, NGO, women empowerment, women empowerment dimension and women empowerment measure scale/index.

INTRODUCTION

The empowerment of women is one of the vital issues of development. United Nations millennium development goal No. 3 is promote gender equality and women empowerment (Source: The Millennium Development Goal Report, 2006). Women empowerment is magic potion of development. Women's comparative control of income and other economic resources has consequences that positively improve both gender

equality and development. These consequences are (1) gain more equality and control over their own lives, (2) contributing: (a) directly to their children's human capital (nutrition, health and education) and thereby indirectly to their nation's income growth; (b) directly to the wealth and well-being of their nations, and (c) indirectly to their country's national income growth through their own and their educated daughters by lower fertility (there is an inverse relationship between the fertility rate and national income growth). Also, more female economic power might help reduce corruption, conflict and violence in their nations (Blumberg, 2005). The empowerment of women is one of the vital issues of development. It is expected that women's empowerment through access to savings and credits, employment, income opportunities, consumption, mobility, education, health, control over asset, personal security and participation in the political process will improve the well being of women (Mayoux, 2005).

In this study I will discuss the concept of women empowerment, the process of women empowerment and the measurement of women empowerment. In this paper I will explain the measurement scale of women empowerment which had been used in different literature reviews. To measure the women empowerment, I referred various dimensions. A number of items are arranged under each of dimensions. In this paper I will synthesize and list the most commonly used measurement scales of women empowerment, drawing from the frameworks developed by various authors. The empirical

literatures on women empowerment are reviewed in section V.

This paper is followed as follows. Section II reviews the concept of women empowerment, section III gives an overview of the process of women empowerment. Section IV reviews the empirical literature on Women's Empowerment. Section V briefly reviews the measurement of women empowerment. Section VI concludes the paper.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process that enables women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. Broadly, it is defined as control over material assets, economic resources and ideology (Batliwala, 1995). Empowerment is defined as the processes by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices (Kabeer, 2005). Women's empowerment includes some reference to an expansion of choice and freedom to make decisions and take the actions necessary to shape life-outcomes (Malhotra & Schuler, 2002). Women's empowerment refers to the ability of women to transform economic and social development when empowered to fully participate in the decisions that affect their lives through leadership training, coaching, consulting, and the provision of enabling tools for women to lead within their communities, regions, and countries (Natural Capital Institute, 2005). Self-decision regarding education, participation, mobility, economic independency, public speaking, awareness and exercise of rights, political participation and many more factors ensure women empowerment. In short women empowerment is the breaking of personal limitation (Answers Corporation 2009). UNICEF uses the Women's Empowerment Framework constructed by Longwe, which encompasses welfare, access to resources, awareness-raising, participation, and control (UNICEF, 1994).

Conceptual framework for assessing changes in women's lives consists of five matrixes and is specially designed to investigate the impact of development interventions on women's lives (Chen & Mahmud, 1995). Chen & Mahmud sets out five matrices which categorize the variables that need to be considered and suggests a sequence or order in which to consider them. The categories considered are comprehensive enough to cover most important variables, but few enough that the investigation will be manageable. These five matrixes are input, classification of women, pathways, indicator and status ranking matrix.

PROCESS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

There are various attempts in the literature to develop a full understanding of women empowerment throughout the process down into key components. In this section I will discuss how women empowerment is created that mean the process of women empowerment. We will discuss the process of women empowerment of Bayes (1998) and Mayoux (2005). Bayes (1998) has described that microcredit helps poor women to be empowered in three ways as follows.

First, by providing independent sources of income outside home, microcredit tends to reduce economic dependency of the women on husbands and thus help enhance autonomy.

Second, the same independent sources of income together with their exposure to new sets of ideas, values and social support should make these women more assertive of their rights.

And finally, micro credit programmes by providing control over material resources should raise women's prestige and status in the eyes of husbands and thereby promote intersperse consultation.

Mayoux (2005) has drawn a spiral process of women empowerment including three paradigms (Financial self-sustainability, poverty alleviation and feminist empowerment) which are described below.

It is assumed that increasing women's access to savings and credit gives them a greater economic role in decision-making through their decision about savings and credit (Figure 3.1). When women control decisions regarding credit and savings, they will optimize their own and the household's welfare. The investment in women's micro enterprise will develop employment opportunities for women and thus have a 'trickle down and out' effect. It is then assumed that this economic empowerment will guide to increase well-being empowerment and also social and political empowerment.

Financial self-sustainability paradigm

It is assumed that increasing women's access to savings and credit gives them a greater economic role in decision-making through their decision about savings and credit use. If their repayment is good they can involve in savings and credit more and more. By taking decision about savings and credit use they involve in micro-enterprise which increase their income. Increasing income create women control over their income that increases wage and employment for women.

Table 1: Empirical literature on women's empowerment

Researchers	Findings
Hashemi <i>et al.</i> (1996)	Grameen Bank member have more empowerment than non MFI member. Old member have more empowerment score than new member.
Banu <i>et al.</i> 2000	There is a positive relationship between the length of membership in BRAC and women's ability to become owners of houses. The survey findings on women's control over assets are quite encouraging.
Newaz(2000)	The majority of the women respondents have gained confidence and felt like sharing knowledge and skill with others. Moreover exposure to new sets of ideas and social support has made them more assertive after joining micro-credit group etc.
Handy & Kassam (2004)	The findings is Comparing the empowerment between theses group, they find that it is significantly different between these three groups. The supervisor's empowerment is more than the fieldworkers and the fieldworker's empowerment is more than the recipients. The duration of involvement is a significant related to women empowerment.
Rahman & Naoroze (2007)	Women's empowerment is positively and significantly correlated with their education, extension media contact and exposure to training, as well as their participation in aquaculture, but age is not significant.
Mostofa <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Older women have more empowerment than younger women.

Poverty alleviation paradigm

It is assumed that increasing women's access to savings and credit, increasing income, and control over their income increase women's decision about consumption which increase wellbeing of women, children and men. Mayoux (2005) said that 'the assumption is that increasing women's access to micro-finance will enable women to make a greater contribution to household income and wellbeing and this will transfer into improved wellbeing for women and enable women to bring about wider changes in gender in equality'.

Feminist empowerment paradigm

It is assumed that increasing women's access to savings and credit, involve in micro-enterprise and increasing income increase women's status. Control over income and increasing women's status improves the ability to negotiate change in gender relation. Increasing wage and employment opportunity and ability to negotiate change in gender relation increases mobility and knowledge of social, legal and political issues. However Mayoux (2005) said that access to savings and credit, involvement in micro-

enterprise, income and control over income are the socio-economic factors which influence women empowerment. From literature review we can know some other important socio-economic factors which are amount of loan, loan repayment performance, training exposure and extension media contact. Using larger loan they can increase income. By good loan repayment performance they can continue their micro-enterprise. By training exposure and extension media contact they can increase their knowledge about their micro-enterprise and socio-political issues.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

In this section I will describe the empirical literature on women's empowerment. In Table 1 I will describe the findings developed by various authors. I reviewed approximately ten empirical studies that have used quantitative or qualitative data to understand some aspect or difference of women's empowerment in an effort to answer the following questions: How has presented research handled the challenges and promises of measuring empowerment?

Table 2.1: Commonly used dimensions of empowerment and potential operationalization in the household, community, and broader arenas

Dimension	Household	Community	Broader Arenas
Economic	Women's control over income; relative contribution to family support; access to and control of family resources	Women's access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement and/or representation in local trade associations; access to markets	Women's representation in high paying jobs; women CEO's; representation of women's economic interests in macro-economic policies, state and federal budgets
Socio-Cultural	Women's freedom of movement; lack of discrimination against daughters; commitment to educating daughters	Women's visibility in and access to social spaces; access to modern transportation; participation in extra-familial groups and social networks; shift in patriarchal norms (such as son preference); symbolic	Women's literacy and access to a broad range of educational options; Positive media images of women, their roles and contributions
Political	Knowledge of political system and means of access to it; domestic support for political engagement; exercising the right to vote	Women's involvement or mobilization in the local political system/campaigns, support for specific candidates or legislation; representation in local bodies of government	Women's representation in regional and national bodies of government; strength as a voting bloc; representation of women's interests in effective lobbies and interest groups

MEASUREMENT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

To measure the women empowerment, we referred various dimensions. A number of items are arranged under each of dimensions and the women taking part in the survey will be asked to indicate their apparent extent of empowerment along a point range. The empowerment score of a respondent in a particular dimension of empowerment is computed by adding the scores obtained in all items in that class.

Commonly used dimensions of women empowerment

Malhotra, Schuler & Boender (2002) synthesize and list the most commonly used dimensions of women's empowerment, drawing from the frameworks developed by various authors. Allowing for overlap, these frameworks suggest that women's

empowerment needs to occur along the following dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. However, these dimensions are very broad in scope, and within each dimension, there is a range of sub-domains within which women may be empowered. So, for example, the "socio-cultural" dimension covers a range of empowerment sub domains, from marriage systems to norms regarding women's physical mobility, to non-familial social support systems and networks available to women. Moreover, in order to operationalize these dimensions, one should consider indicators at various levels of social aggregation the household and the community, as well as regional, national and even global levels. They group commonly used and potentially useful indicators within various 'arenas' or spheres of life which I have presented in Table 2.2.

Continue Table 2.2

Dimension	Household	Community	Broader Arenas
Familial/ Interpersonal	Participation in domestic decision-making; control over sexual relations; ability to make childbearing decisions, use contraception, access abortion; control over spouse selection and marriage timing; freedom from domestic violence	Shifts in marriage and kinship systems indicating greater value and autonomy for women (e.g. later marriages, self-selection of spouses, reduction in the practice of dowry; acceptability of divorce); local campaigns against domestic violence	Regional/national trends in timing of marriage, options for divorce; political, legal, religious support for (or lack of active opposition to) such shifts; systems providing easy access to contraception, safe abortion, reproductive health services
Legal	Knowledge of legal rights; domestic support for exercising rights	Community mobilization for rights; campaigns for rights awareness; effective local enforcement of legal rights	Laws supporting women's rights, access to resources and options; Advocacy for rights and legislation; use of judicial system to redress rights violations
Psychological	Self-esteem; self-efficacy; psychological well-being	Collective awareness of injustice, potential of mobilization	Collective awareness of injustice, potential of mobilization

Table 3: Commonly used measurement scale of women empowerment

Researchers	Responses and assigned scores	Measurement scale of women empowerment/ empowerment index
Hashemi <i>et al.</i> (1996)	They used different assigned scores for different dimension	0 and 1 A number of score is empowered and code is 1 and "not empowered" is 0.
Handy & Kassam (2004)	0, ½ and 1	0 to 25 Aggregate of total score
Pitt <i>et al.</i> (2006)	0 and 1	0 and 1
Rahman & Naoroze (2007)	1, 2, 3 and 4	0 to 1 Unit empowerment score = $\frac{\text{Mean score of a particular dimension}}{\text{Maximum possible score of the dimension}}$
Mostofa <i>et al.</i> (2008)	1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7	0 and 1 (0=1,2,3; 1= 4, 5, 6 &7)
Nessa (2010)	1, 2, 3, 4 and 5	1 to 5 Mean score, (Total score/item number)

Measurement scale of women empowerment

In this paper we will synthesize and list the most commonly used measurement scales of women empowerment, drawing from the frameworks developed by various authors. Various authors used different measurement scale to indicate their apparent extent of empowerment along a point range which I synthesize in Table 3.

Some of the empirical research on women's empowerment has used some variant of an index approach to address this problem. In this approach, answers to different questions are weighted and summed to structure one universal "score" that represents empowerment. For example, a "yes" answer to each of 12 questions may be coded as one and a "no" as zero; then these ones and zeros are added to produce an index with a minimum of zero and a maximum of 12. This approach is quite arbitrary because the researcher must choose the weights without reference to theory or data. Some studies have used only one scale, while others construct multiple scales for various dimensions of questions.

One article (Pitt *et al.*, 2006) treats empowerment variables as measured through a set of observed variables or indicators. The idea is that unobserved latent variables account for the dependencies among the indicators. The number of empowerment latent variables is smaller than the set of empowerment indicators, the idea being that the number of true "underlying dimensions" that describe a condition (such as empowerment) is smaller than the number of observed indicators. The latent variable model estimated has two parts. The first part links the unobserved latent variables to a set of observed indicators and is called the measurement model. The well-known factor analysis model is a special case of a latent variable measurement model with indicators measured on a continuous scale. After fitting a factor analysis model, latent scores (factor scores) are easily computed and are commonly used as dependent variables in the second part of the analysis.

CONCLUSION

As a review of presented theoretical and empirical literature, this paper is identifying the most capable methodological approaches to measuring and analyzing women empowerment. My review indicates that in order to develop an approach to measuring and analyzing women empowerment that is practicable for the developing countries' government, non government organization (NGO) and micro finance institutions (MFI). However women's empowerment is a composite concept that

poses many challenges in conceptualization and measurement. My review revealed a number of essential strengths in the existing effort on women's empowerment that provides the groundwork for further evolution on measurement.

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