
Study of Evolution of Framework's for Measuring Economic Empowerment of Women

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Abstract: Literature circling around empowerment of women has been extensively studied to craft some significant methodological stand about the measurement of empowerment (Kabeer 2002). There is increasing acknowledgement that economically empowering women is vital both to gain women's rights and to achieve wider development goals such as economic growth, education, poverty reduction, health, and welfare. This study therefore focuses on understanding the evolution of concept on women empowerment over the years and its importance. Alongside the changed definition of women empowerment, it extensively studies the various frameworks extended for measuring women's economic empowerment. Finally, it concludes by deducing the major constructs or indicators that play a pivotal role in measuring economic empowerment of women. It is through measurement of these constructs that effective policy can be formulated for effectively empowering women globally.

Keywords: Evolution, Economic, Women.

INTRODUCTION

'Empowering women' as an idea was introduced in 1985 at the UN's Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, which elucidated it as a redistribution of economic and social powers and control of resources in favour of women. (UN Women 1985). Women's empowerment since then has been an international agenda for all nations. The United Nations authority majorly reflected discrimination against women as a universal alarm. This signals the kind of concern the international community has with regard to women's rights in general and their right to equality in particular. The declaration stands that all the fundamental freedoms and rights are available equally to both the genders without any exception. Therefore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) also played a very significant role in shielding the rights of women (UN Women 2013)

Globally concept of women empowerment is split into three broad waves historically. The first wave which started as early as 19th century revolved around women seeking equal rights to vote (UN women 2009). In 1893 most celebrated suffragist, Kate Sheppard won New Zealand the honour of being the first self-governing country to grant national voting rights to women. Around the same time Russian philanthropist Anna Filosofova, worked equally hard to replace cash benefits extended to poor women with better education and training opportunities that would grant women decent work to help them stand on their own feet (ibid). The second wave towards empowering women was observed around the 1900's that embedded the revolution around role of women in society. In 1911 Raicho Hiratsuka from Japan co-founded the first all women run literary journal

'Seito' which questioned the traditional roles which women were confined to within the four walls of their homes. 1973 witnessed the granting of equal pay for women when Billie Jean King threatened to boycott the US Open tournament, making it the first sport to offer pay equality (UN Women, 2010). Finally, the third wave of feminism is often attributed to the late 1990s and early 21st century. In 1990 Indian environmentalist Ms Vandana Shiva launched various programmes on biodiversity, food & water- empowering women by protecting their livelihoods within their communities. Most recently in 2016 Zimbabwe's constitutional court made history by ruling against child marriage and customary law unions before the age of 18 (ibid).

Today although more than 140 nations globally guarantee gender equality in their constitutions, women still continue to face stark inequalities directly and indirectly through laws, politics, stereotypes and social practices. Despite numerous laws and policies in place around 800 women die every day from childbirth and pregnancy out of which 99 percent women accrue to developing nations. Even with increased voice over gender parity, women globally earn 24% lesser than men for the same tasks performed. Global average of leadership roles taken up by women in politics still remain as low as 22 percent. 700 million women alive today are forced to marry before the age of 18 out of which 250 million are married before the age of 15 years. These statistics provided by World International Organization- UN Women, clearly threatens all the efforts made towards truly empowering women. It also, raises concern around how to ensure and therefore measure the extent of women empowerment for effective policy making.

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Importance and changed definition of women empowerment

The autonomy and empowerment of women along with the improvement of their social, political, health and economic status is a highly important end in itself. In addition, it is vital for the attainment of sustainable development (UNDP Report, 2020). The full involvement and partnership of both women and men is needed in productive and reproductive life, involving shared responsibilities for the care and nurturing of children and maintaining the household. However, globally women are facing menaces to their lives and well-being as a result of being overtaxed with work and of their lack of influence and power.

In many regions of the world, women receive lesser formal education than men, and at the same time, often women's knowledge, abilities and coping mechanisms go unrecognized. The relations of power that obstruct women's attainment of fulfilling and healthy lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the public. Attaining change requires policy and programme plans that will better women's access to secure livelihoods and economic resources, get rid of their extreme responsibilities with regard to housework, remove legal obstructions to their participation in public life, and increase social awareness through effective actions and programmes of education and mass communication. In addition, improving the status of women also enhances their decision-making capacity at all levels in all areas of life. This is essential for the long run success of population programmes. Experience shows that population and development programmes are most efficient and effective when steps have simultaneously been taken to improve the status of women. (UNFPA 1994).

Early studies on status of women covered aspects of empowerment without particularly labelling it as such. One of the earliest empirical studies in this area, for example, used the more general term "women's status" but located a chain of gender-related power differentials in the household, noting how essential the family unit is to understanding the operation of gender in a society (Meena Acharaya 1983). They also highlight the relations between women's economic roles and their control over resources and life decisions. Over the years definition of women empowerment has evolved magnificently where terms like 'gender equality' and 'gender equity' are often closely used to define the same.

There exists a nexus of a few crucial, overlapping terms that are most frequent included in defining empowerment: options, control, choice and power. Most of the time these are referring to women's ability and potential to make decisions and affect outcomes of importance to themselves and their families. Control and power over one's own life and resources is often stressed for women to be empowered. For instance, (Sen 1993) defines empowerment as "altering relations of power...which constrain women's options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well-being".

A major component of empowerment that distinguishes it from other concepts is, agency—in other words, females themselves must be significant actors in the process of change that is being defined or measured (G. Sen 1993). Thus, there could be an enhancement in indicators of gender equality, but unless the intervening processes involved women as agents of that change rather than merely just as its recipients, it would not be considered as empowerment. However, it would merely be betterment in outcomes from one point in time to another. The importance of agency in the discussion on empowerment emerges from "bottom up" rather than "top down" approaches towards development. At the institutional and aggregate levels, it emphasizes the importance of involvement and participation and "social inclusion" (Friedmann 1992). At the micro level, it is rooted in the idea of self-efficacy and the importance of the realization by individual females that they can be the agents of change in their own lives.

World Bank Report 2005, extends the definition of empowerment beyond just women's ability to make effective choices. It asserts that a person's degree of empowerment has previously been judged by their capacity to make choices i.e., Agency function. The various agency indicators of empowerment lie in different asset endowments like assets of material, social, financial or human nature (Ruth Alsop et al, 2005). However, this curtails the definition of empowerment to just the concept of 'power of choices' which is rather narrow. The report adds to the definition of empowerment by introducing the concept of 'Opportunity'. Opportunity structure may be defined as the institutional context in which choices are made (World Bank Report, 2005). It is measured by the availability of various formal and informal institutions including laws, governing frameworks

and customs. Therefore, the degree of women empowerment is no longer restricted to availability of choices – agency, but also use of these choices & their achievement- opportunity (ibid).

To understand this extended definition of agency and opportunity in defining women empowerment let us consider few examples. Suppose a female entrepreneur wants to extend her business for which she chooses to take a loan from the bank. However, this process of acquiring the loan was rather long and tedious- needed her to fill a lot of forms, produce papers for collateral which she did not have, appoint a lawyer which she could not afford etc. Here even though the choice of applying for loan is available to the entrepreneur she is not able to avail the opportunity and therefore, is not necessarily empowered (Srijan, 1999). As a result, a woman may experience different degrees of empowerment that may be explained through assets endowments (agency)- such as education, information and social capital as well as opportunity structure like social norms, customs, behaviours associated with caste etc. (Alsop, Ajoblom and Krishna, 2001).

Also appearing often in definitions of empowerment is an element related to the idea of human agency, self-efficacy. Taking mainly from the human rights and feminist perspectives, many recent definitions contain the concept that a fundamental shift in perceptions, or “inner transformation,” is core to the formulation of choices. That is, females should be able to define self-interest and choice, and consider themselves as not only able, but entitled to make choices (Nussbaum 2000) and (A. Sen 1999). Kabeer (2001) goes a step further and defines this process in terms of “thinking outside the system” and challenging the social structure.

To summarize it, is safe to assert that the definition of women empowerment has evolved overtime. Also, the meaning & degree of empowerment may differ drastically between countries not only on the basis of asset endowments but also on their relative opportunity structures. Free movement of women in Syria may signify women empowerment but the same may not be true for women residing in Amsterdam. Such stark differences and broadness of the concept of women empowerment makes its measurement a rather challenging task. The subsequent section therefore tries to identify few general domains and indicators, which when used in a given setting by accounting for the purpose of a study, helps measure women empowerment.

Developing indicators for measuring Women Empowerment

Women's empowerment is regarding the process of change where a woman with advanced inability to choose has the freedom and access to take decisions and make choices. A broad gap separates this understanding of empowerment from the more forms of advocacy which have asked the quantification and measurement of empowerment. The potential to exercise choice and decision making involves three inter-linked dimensions: Resources (characterised broadly to incorporate not just access, but also future cases, to both material, human and social resources); Agency (including processes of decision making, as well as less measurable manifestations of agency such as negotiation, deception and manipulation); and Achievements (outcomes of well-being).

Empowerment being a very dynamic process, breaking the process into components such as agency, enabling factors and outcomes may be useful in recognising policy interventions to support the process of empowerment, and for evaluating the impact of the same. Many different efforts have been made in recent years to develop comprehensive frameworks representing the various dimensions along with which women can be empowered. These frameworks engage different levels of specificity and have been extensively studied to narrow down major constructs that aptly measure women empowerment.

UNICEF uses the Women's Empowerment Framework developed by Sara Longwe: 'The Women's Equality and Empowerment Framework 1994', which covers welfare, access to resources, participation, awareness-raising and control as indicators of women empowerment (Ruth Alsop, 2006). The model looks into 'Measuring Empowerment and Social Inclusion' (MESI) that seeks to develop more meaningful and better ways to measure, track and monitor changes in these two outcomes and also to learn something about how empowerment and inclusion relate to each other for important development outcomes. The MESI study conceptualized empowerment as focused around agency and the agents' assets, and social inclusion as covering the opportunity structures. Literature thus extends an Empowerment Index (EMI) to measure empowerment, using a range of variables and indicators that sought to catch the respondent's sense of agency. The indicators comprised of five dimensions: (1) participation in local development services, (2) knowledge and awareness of rights and procedures, (3) social networks (economic and political), (4) confidence and comfort level in accessing services and exercising rights, and (5) efforts to influence local government (ibid).

Jejeebhoy, 'Women's Education, Autonomy, and Reproductive Behaviour: Experience from Four Developing Countries' (1995) worked with Knowledge autonomy, Physical autonomy, Decisionmaking autonomy, Emotional autonomy, Social and Economic autonomy and self-reliance. UNDP (1995) has used Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM): ratio of female administrators and managers; ratio of seats in parliament held by women; women's share of earned income; ratio of female professionals and technical workers; women's share of earned income. The GEM framework for assessing women empowerment therefore focuses on political and economic decision making, that is, women's potential to take advantage of capabilities.

The Canadian International Development Agency's (1996) framework includes four broad dimensions of empowerment namely: economic, socio-cultural empowerment, psychological, political and legal empowerment. Economic indicators highlighted a person's ability to control income, own assets, and contribution towards family support while socio-cultural indicators assessed freedom of movement, gender disparities, role in decision making and freedom from violence. The other dimensions that measure empowerment like legal aspect entails the knowledge of legal rights, political factors judge the ability and freedom to vote and Psychological indicate the attainment of higher self-esteem, self-efficacy and personal well-being (Alkire S, 2007).

Kishor (2000a) in his assessment of women empowerment of women in Egypt considers constructs like financial autonomy, lifetime exposure to employment, participation in the modern sector along with decision-making as major indicators for assessing women empowerment. He further asserts that sharing of gender roles, family structure and say in marriage are among the other key constructs that largely affect the level of women empowerment.

From the study of Legovini (2005) 'The Women's Development Initiatives Project (WDIP)' is currently under implementation in Ethiopia and is a World Bank-aided project. The project's recent impact evaluation examined the empowerment status of women of Ethiopia and assessed the effect of participation in WDIP on women's empowerment. The study used indicators and variables in the state, economic, and social domains in order to expand economic opportunities, build awareness and strengthen self-reliance that would affect both empowerment and widen development outcomes. The impact study treated agency and opportunity structure as key determinants of empowerment. Indicators covered those related to empowerment (use, presence and effectiveness of choice) and broader development outcomes (changes in education, health, and other assets).

Currently there are several indicators as suggested by literature that makes use of country-level factors to obtain a quantitative measure of empowerment at regional and global level as well. Two globally-used indices for the same include the Gender Development Index (GDI); assessing gender differences in human development through indicators of knowledge, health and living standards. Another such index is The Gender Inequality Index (GII) examining gender gaps in empowerment, reproductive health, and labour force participation. Specific indices have also been created for the country of Africa including the African Gender Equality Index (AGEI) and the African Gender and Development Index (A D Bank, 2015). The AGEI measures gender differences in human development, economic opportunities, and legal rights; the index focuses on the role of gender equality in advancing agricultural and business productivity. Furthermore, the AGDI considers three areas: economic power (opportunities), social power (capabilities), and political power (agency) (UNECA 2011). Recently, Ewerling (2017) used DHS data from 34 African nations to develop the Survey-Based Women's Empowerment (SWPER) Index which has three areas: social independence, attitude to violence and decision making. The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) looks at empowerment in agency and inclusion of women, particularly within the agriculture sector. It analyses the extent to which women are empowered in their households and communities across five key indicators: income, production, resources, and time, as well as the extent of inequality between females and males within the households through the Gender Parity Index (GPI) (Mansi Anad, 2019).

International Centre for Research on Women along with DFID and Bill and Melinda Gates

Foundation worked extensively to construct a comprehensive framework to measure Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE). The framework broadly is constructed on two inter-linked components: power & agency and economic advancement – are essential to attain better lives for women and their families. Their measurements and variables of agency are focused around mobility, self-confidence/efficacy, decision-making, gender norms and responsibilities and measured at different levels-individual/household and community/institution (Anne Marie Golla 2011). Allowing for overlap, these frameworks depict and suggest that women's empowerment requires occurring along the following dimensions: economic, familial/interpersonal, socio-cultural, legal, psychological and political. However, these dimensions are very broad and wide in scope, and within each dimension, there is an array and range of sub-domains and sub areas within which women may be empowered.

Focusing on the economic aspect of measuring women empowerment, there is increasing acknowledgement that economically empowering women is vital both to gain women's rights and to achieve wider development goals such as economic growth, education, poverty reduction, health, and welfare. A woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed, progress and advance economically and the power and potential to make economic decisions and act on the same (World Bank, 2005). Given several comprehensive frameworks that the study outlines for measuring women empowerment, it is clear that vivid dimensions including economic, socio-political, cultural and psychological makes women empowerment a multidimensional concept (Malhotra, 1997).

After reviewing the different frameworks of measuring women empowerment, it is safe to assert that most of them do not measure empowerment as a comprehensive concept. In fact, they ideally deal with some particular slice of empowerment. Therefore, the natural next step for this study is to build on the strengths of the existing

literature and put forward a comprehensive framework or indicators that help measure economic empowerment of women. It should also be kept in mind that given the broad definition of women empowerment, considering their economic empowerment without considering socio-cultural constructs would leave the framework incomplete. The following table draws on the existing literature of various frameworks and tries to outline one such a comprehensive framework with key indicators of economic empowerment of women.

Table 1: Proposed constructs and key indicators that measure women empowerment

| Indicators for women empowerment | Literature that supports the constructs |
|--|--|
| Process Indicators | |
| Participation | Kishor 2000a, Schuler et al. 1997, Basu and Basu 1991, Malhotra and Mather 1997 |
| Issues faced by women | Kabeer 1997, Malhotra and Mather 1997, Schuler et al. 1996, Malhotra et al. 1995, Acharya and Bennett 1983 |
| Success | ICWR 2006 |
| Power Indicators | |
| Control over assets | Thomas, Contreras, and Frankenberg 1997, Pitt and Khandker 1998, Khandker 1998, Quisumbing and de la Briere 2000, Quisumbing and Maluccio 1999 |
| Agency/ Decision-making | Frankenberg and Thomas 2001, Grasmuck and Espinal 2000, Hashemi et al. 1996, Jejeebhoy 2000, Kabeer 1998, Malhotra and Mather 1997 |
| Autonomy and Mobility Selfconfidence/ Self-efficacy | Jejeebhoy 1995, Kishor 2000a, Schuler and Hashemi 1993, Abadian 1996, Dyson and Moore 1983, Gage 1995 |
| Gender Norms | Malhotra et al. 1995, A. Sen 1999, Malhotra and Mather 1997, Kritiz et al. 2000, Acharya and Bennett 1983 |
| Gender Roles/ Responsibilities | Kritiz et al. 2000, ICWR 2006 |
| Economic Advancement Indicators | |
| Productivity and Skills | Goetz and Gupta 1996, Ackerly 1995 |
| Business Practice | Kishor 2000a, A. Sen 1999, Goetz and Gupta 1996, Tzannatos 1999, Winter 1994, Acharya and Bennett 1983 |
| Income | Haddad and Hoddinott 1994, Mayoux 2001, Thomas 1997, Thomas 1990 |
| Consumption smoothing/risk | Hoddinott and Haddad 1995, Pitt and Khandker 1998, Khandker 1998, Quisumbing and de la Briere 2000 |
| Work environment | Schuler et al. 1997, A. Sen 1999 |
| Prosperity | Goetz and Gupta 1996, ICWR 2006 |

Source: Compiled and constructed from existing literature by the author.

The above proposed constructs under three broad dimensions may be successful in measuring women empowerment as different levels of aggregation. These levels of aggregation may be ascertained according to the need of a particular study as: a) Individual level of women/ Meso; b) Community/ Micro level and c) Broader arenas/ Macro level (World Bank, 2002).

CONCLUSION

Women's economic empowerment is a multifaceted dynamic concept. The emphasis and stress on promoting women's economic empowerment (WEE) within the sphere of economic development has led to a shift in focus. Firstly, it focuses on the greatest marginalized population in the world, women and, secondly, on enhancing and improving a woman's capacity for self-determination, her empowerment. Furthermore, it accentuates the relevance and significance of both access and agency to meaningfully better the economic lives of women. In light of this, there is increasing regard from economic programs to understand, measure and capture agency and opportunities greatly across interventions in order to more purposely pursue women's economic empowerment. Measuring women's empowerment is essential because it provides a regular reminder of its importance to programs and staff. This is because, there are several agricultural development programs that do not have a gender empowerment focus, but by having measures of women's empowerment grounded in their monitoring systems, staff members are motivated to consider women's empowerment as an objective of the project. It also is vital to train staff members on existing inequalities, gender and other social equities, and how empowerment

processes can work to improve equity. Also important are the standard change implications of having women's empowerment measures rooted in program monitoring.

Engaging program staff, program beneficiaries, and communities more widely on questions of empowerment increases awareness on these issues and thereby helps to enhance social norm change. Measures of empowerment have multiplied without being systematically evaluated across contexts and over time. On one hand, from a conceptual point of view, women's empowerment is multidimensional and context specific. On the other hand, similar measures have been developed for use across the contexts. So, accurate testing of the invariance of these measures across contexts and over time is important. According to (Yount 2017), measuring women's empowerment is challenging because it frequently requires long, involved scales to measure the multiple dimensions. For program monitoring, we need to pair these measures down to a core set so the process of measuring women's empowerment is not ineffective and inconvenient over time for the program staff.

To succeed, progress and advance economically, women need their sources and skills to compete in markets, as well as equal and fair access to economic institutions. To have the power and agency to gain from economic activities, women need to have the ability and potential to make decisions and act on the same and control profits and resources. Therefore, economic empowerment is comprised of two inter-linked components: a) Economic advancement and b) Power and agency. Both components are interrelated, and both are vital to achieve better lives for women and their families. Economic gain and success, that is, economic advancement, promote and encourage women's power and agency. At the same time, when a woman is able to control and share in resource use, that is, power and to define and make choices, that is, agency, she is better able to advance and progress economically (Anne Marie Golla 2011).

The study proposes three major indicators of measuring economic empowerment of women. These indicators are: a) Process Indicators measured through- Issues faced by women, Participation, and Success of women; b) Power Indicators measured through parameters like- Agency/ Decisionmaking, Control over assets, Autonomy and Mobility Self-confidence/ Self-efficacy, Gender Norms, Gender Roles/ Responsibilities and c) Economic Advancement Indicators assessed through- Income, Productivity and Skills, Business Practice, Consumption smoothing/risk, Work environment, Prosperity. These broad indicators can be adjusted to requirement of a study and be aggregated at different levels, be it, personal, community or macro level. Even though this study attempts to aggregate a comprehensive framework that bring together all possible constructs that effectively measure economic empowerment of women, sustained efforts at analysis and refinement are necessary for moving the measurement forward with socio-cultural and economic changes globally.

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