

Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment

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Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)

Women are essential to global development: there is irrefutable evidence that communities progress when women have influence over financial decision-making in their households, and GDP increases as more women formally participate in the economy.

Institutions in both the public and the private sector, therefore, have reason to support the empowerment of women across the globe. However, the private sector is uniquely positioned to impact women's participation in the economy, with the capacity to reach all the corners of the world via global employee networks, supply chains, and customer bases.

A recent [publication by Oxford University and the Global Business Coalition for Women's Economic Empowerment \(GBC4WEE\)](#), demonstrated both the traditional development and the business case for the private sector to invest in what they term **women's economic empowerment (WEE)**. The publication highlighted several areas of WEE that require greater focus, including understanding the impact of WEE interventions.

Since 2012, Ipsos has been implementing impact studies for corporate WEE initiatives, such as [Coca-Cola's 5by20 program](#) and [Mondelēz's Cocoa Life program](#). In this paper we share some of the methodological findings from our work, with the goal of generating discussion and supporting expert measurement of WEE interventions.

A Multi-Dimensional Framework for WEE

While there is a need to track the progress of WEE at the macro level (for example, female educational attainment, the number of women in the workforce, women's earnings, and number of women banked), those delivering interventions intending to empower women "on the ground" need to track change at the beneficiary and community levels to be able to understand whether, how, and why their investments are having an impact.

Early approaches to measuring WEE interventions have focused primarily on economic outcomes, such as business growth, income earned, access to financial services, and financial decision-making in the household. Ipsos studies in the WEE field have produced powerful feedback on the success of programs from this perspective. For example, our evaluation of [Coca-Cola's 5by20 Program](#) in South Africa found that [women increased their business revenue an average of 44% after receiving business skills training through the program](#).

However, we have learned that while focusing on economic indicators may offer answers around macro-level participation in the economy, contextualizing economic empowerment within empowerment more broadly is essential to providing WEE implementers with meaningful assessments of intervention success. **To offer an example: a woman may generate income, but if household or cultural norms dictate that she immediately hands this income over to her husband, does this constitute economic empowerment?**

WEE, is not the result of a chronological chain of events where, for example, access to loans coupled with training leads to income generation, leads to financial decision-making, leads to economic empowerment. Rather, it is multi-dimensional and non-linear. WEE is dependent on structural circumstances within the community, the household, and the individual herself, as well as on perceived realities and cultural norms. An intervention in one area may impact multiple empowerment dimensions, or structural circumstances may prevent the intervention from having any impact at all. Furthermore, women may go through multiple stages of empowerment such as building confidence and learning and applying skills, before experiencing economic empowerment.

To expand on the example above, a woman may, as the result of an intervention, acquire knowledge, access resources, and gain the confidence to begin to grow vegetables to sell. However, it may be her husband who takes the vegetables to market and collects the income from them. The woman may or may not acquire some authority within her household to make financial decisions as a result of her contribution. And because she doesn't participate in the market herself or receive the income into her own account, she is still not visibly, or formally, participating in the economy.

We have articulated the complexity of these various dimensions of WEE in the graphic below. This framework provides a flexible yet comprehensive basis for a conceptualization of WEE in the specific circumstances of the intervention under observation. We have operationalized this framework through a set of indicators and metrics that are being tested in multiple impact studies around the world.

	ARENAS OF EMPOWERMENT		
	INDIVIDUAL	HOUSEHOLD	COMMUNITY
HER OBJECTIVE REALITY	A woman's individual circumstances: Her education, skills, and work status, her access to technology and financial services, and her individual legal rights.	A woman's role within her household: Her influence over financial and non-financial decisions and assets, how she is regarded and treated, her ability to move freely and safely.	A woman's role in her community: Her participation in community activities, how she is regarded and treated, her ability to move freely and safely.
HER SELF-PERCEPTION	How does she feel about herself? Does she believe in herself? Does she have confidence in her abilities? Is she satisfied with her circumstances and the possibilities for the future?	How does she feel about her role and responsibilities? Does she feel confident in her ability to make decisions on behalf of her household? Does she feel heard and respected? Are her rights taken seriously?	How does she feel about her role and responsibilities? Does she feel confident that she is able to participate in community activities? Does she feel heard and respected? Are her rights taken seriously?
THE CULTURAL NORMS OF HER COMMUNITY	How should women be treated as individuals? Should women be educated and have access to employment? Should women have equal access to technology and financial services? Should women be treated equally by law?	What should be the role of women in the household? Should women be an equal participant in household decision-making? Should she be safe from harm, and able to express her opinions freely?	What should be the role of women in the community? Should women participate in community decision-making? Should she be respected and able to move freely without harassment?

Operationalizing the WEE Framework Through Metrics

There are multiple essential components of measuring impact—the importance of a robust theory of change, understanding whether change can be attributed to the program in question, and ensuring that evaluation is efficient and offers good value for money. However, addressing the issue of how we operationalize a shared concept of WEE (as outlined in the graphic above) via a concise set of indicators and metrics is a critical starting point.

While metrics should always be context-specific, accounting for the nuances of the program under examination as well as the local context in which the program is executed, if the goal is to understand how programs are contributing to overall progress on WEE, there is a significant advantage to agreeing a common approach to measuring WEE, and a shared set of indicators and metrics. This would allow the combining of datasets, the comparing of interventions, and the “rolling-up” of interventions to assess collective impact.

The challenge has been to create a set of metrics that cover all relevant dimensions of WEE, while remaining concise and flexible to context: our clients do not have the time or budget to wait for studies based on hundreds of questions and survey instruments that take hours to implement with unwieldy samples of beneficiaries. Rather, they need efficient yet robust proxies for understanding whether their program has moved the needle on WEE.

Based on the multidimensional WEE framework above, our team has produced [a set of approximately 45 indicators](#), which take approximately 25 minutes to field with WEE program beneficiaries. We are currently using these metrics to assess WEE on projects including the [Mondelēz Cocoa Life](#) program and on water stewardship programs in Africa [in partnership with USAID and Coca-Cola through the Water and Development Alliance \(WADA\)](#) in seven countries—Cote d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Indonesia, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Swaziland—and expect to have initial results returned in mid-2018.

Via this paper, our team is making a commitment to sharing the methodological outcomes of these studies: how the WEE framework, indicators, and metrics adapt to context, whether the indicators and metrics indeed offer meaningful proxies for WEE, and how various analytical approaches enable us to understand how the dimensions of WEE interact. We envision a transparent effort to test, refine, and perfect our approach with others working in this field.

We invite researchers and those delivering interventions in WEE to test this approach, share alternative approaches, and discuss their methodological findings. Our ambition is that by the close of 2018 we will have progressed towards a standard for tracking WEE interventions that enables those working in this space to assess their individual and collective impact.

Join the Discussion

Join the discussion on Women's Economic Empowerment with Ipsos' Corporate Sustainability & Citizenship Team:

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