Re-conceptualizing Empowerment:
Ipsos' Approach to Understanding & Measuring Women's Empowerment

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Women's empowerment is what we believe to be the solution to achieving gender equality, but what does women's empowerment consist of, and how do we achieve it?

While astounding progress has been made on critical global development issues such as poverty, health, and educational attainment, the fact is that rights and equalities—including gender equality—have actually declined in recent years, even in rich, democratic countries.[1] Without a renewed focus on rights and equalities, any measured improvement towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will mask significant inequities in the distribution of the benefits of global economic and social development.

Globally today, women do 90% of the world's unpaid domestic and care work, and are disproportionately represented in the informal economy.[2] They make up 39% of the formal workforce, but earn less than three-quarters of men's salaries.[3] They control only 30% of the world's private wealth,[4] make up less than one-third of senior management roles in companies,[5] and are less than 5% of CEOs of Fortune 500 companies.[6] Women also make up less than one quarter of elected officials.[7]

Can sustainable development continue at the same rapid pace of recent years if inequality is increasing? Can global prosperity really advance when half of the world's population is not able to fully realize equal rights and experience equal opportunities to participate? And is progress really progress if it doesn't apply to everyone? The embedded focus on women across the SDGs suggests universal agreement that the answer is "no"—and the mechanism that governments, businesses, and the development sector is relying on to resolve the issue is "women's empowerment."

Conceptualizing Women's Empowerment

Based on a decade of work in the field of women's empowerment, and specifically in conducting impact studies for women's empowerment programs, in 2018 the Ipsos Sustainable Development Team published a women's empowerment conceptual framework. This framework was conceived along with an accompanying set of indicators and metrics that could be applied to develop profiles describing the empowerment of women in different contexts and to track progress in this area over time.[8]

The motivation for publishing this framework centered around the notion that existing models for conceptualizing women's empowerment were incomplete or underwhelming. Much of the conversation about women's empowerment (and how to track gender equality) focuses on what Ipsos calls "objective realities": factors like access to and achievement in education, earnings and legal rights, and reported levels of harassment and violence. These are, of course, important aspects of empowerment and progress towards equality.

[1] Progress against the Sustainable Development Goals." PDF. Social Progress Imperative, 2018. https://www.socialprogress.org/assets/downloads/resources/2018/Progress-Against-the-SDGs.pdf

[2] "World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2018: Global Snapshot." PDF. International Labour Organization, 2018http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_619577.pdf

[3] "Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment." UN Women. July 2018. Accessed February 13, 2019. http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures.

[4] Tindera, Michela. "Women Hold Nearly One Third of Global Private Wealth." Forbes. June 16, 2016. Accessed February 13, 2019. https://www.forbes.com/sites/michelatindera/2016/06/16/women-hold-nearly-one-third-of-global-private-wealth/#5a4a839e4d56.

[5] "Women in Management." Catalyst.org, July 2018.https://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-management

[6] Zarya, Valentina. "The Share of Female CEOs in the Fortune 500 Dropped by 25% in 2018." Fortune. May 21, 2018. Accessed February 13, 2019. http://fortune.com/2018/05/21/women-fortune-500-2018/.

[7] "Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments" World Bank. 2018. Accessed February 13, 2019. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS.

[8] Jones, Meghann. "Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment." Ipsos. February 9, 2018. Accessed February 13, 2019. https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/knowledge/society/measuring-womens-economic-empowerment.

Figure 1: 9-Dimension WE Framework

	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?

However, objective realities do not tell the full story: simply because a woman earns an income, doesn't mean she has decision-making power over that income; just because she is able to participate in the workforce doesn't mean she can do so free from harassment in her workplace; she may have legal rights, but that doesn't necessarily mean that those rights will be systematically enforced.

To really understand whether a woman is able to realize her rights, exercise agency, and fully participate in economy and society requires us to understand how she feels about her ability to do these things and the context of the structural and cultural norms in which she is present. To illustrate this, our 2018 framework *(Figure 1: 9-Dimension WE Framework)* had nine-dimensions. In this model, there is no hierarchy or chronology of empowerment factors: realities, self-perceptions and cultural norms all interact in multiple arenas to assess whether a woman is empowered.

Applying the Framework in the Sustainable Development Context

This multi-dimensional framework offered a flexible yet comprehensive basis for a conceptualization of women's empowerment in the specific circumstances of the intervention under observation, operationalized through a set of indicators and metrics that the Ipsos Sustainable Development Team applied in multiple studies over the last two years.

Case Study 1: **Water And Development Alliance/USAID and Coca-Cola: Understanding the Empowering Impacts of Water Programming on Women**[9]

- **Overview:** There was anecdotal evidence that their water interventions lead indirectly to women's empowerment. The study was designed to investigate this hypothesis.

- **Objective realities:** Women's lives improve when they are able to use a cleaner, closer water source. Impacts included: better health, time savings, education and income opportunities.

- **The role of self-perception:** As women's role inside and outside of the household shifted, so did their self-confidence in what they are capable of in the workplace and community.

- **The role of cultural norms:** As women's role inside and outside of the household shifted, communities began to see new value in women.

Case Study 2: Mondelēz International: Evaluating the Impact of the Cocoa Life Program[10]

- **Overview:** The 2018 WE framework was integrated into the Cocoa Life impact studies to understand the Program's progress on empowering women in Cocoa Life communities.

- **Objective realities:** Women have limited education and influence over how household income is spent, even when they generate it. They also have less access to farm inputs.

- **The role of self-perception:** Women have confidence in their abilities, particularly at the household level. They feel they lack the ability to participate in community decision-making.

- **The role of cultural norms:** Taking care of the household is prioritized over education and income generation. Participation in the community confined to traditional roles for women.
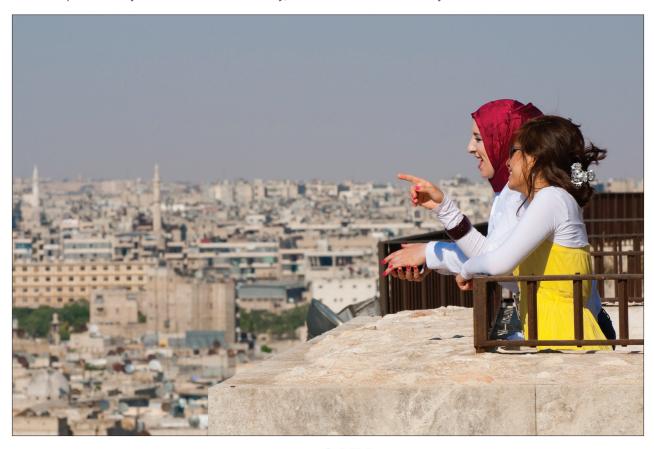

[10] Jones, M., Kiewisch, M., Groot, M., Empowering Women for More Sustainable Cocoa Communities, Mondelēz International - Forthcoming, April 2019.

Case Study 3: UN Women: Understanding the Impact of the Syrian Crisis on Refugee Women and Girls[11]

- **Overview:** The goal of the study was to understand how gender affects the experience of displacement for Syrian refugee women in Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan.

- **Objective realities:** Women have taken on more responsibility, such as income generation, as a result of displacement, though this is seen as more of a necessity than a choice.

- **The role of self-perception:** For some women, this has had empowering effects, such as increased confidence. However, many see this shift as something to be ashamed of.

- **The role of cultural norms:** While some women reflected on shifting cultural norms, more spoke about their hope that they could return to normalcy, and their traditional family roles.

UN WOMEN

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[11] Jones, M. Love, K. "UN Women Reports: Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq." Ipsos. December 10, 2018. Accessed February 13, 2019. https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/knowledge/society/un-women-reports-2018

Learning and Re-conceptualization of the Women's Empowerment Framework

Ongoing usage of the framework naturally yielded opportunities for improvement and expansion. Key learnings from implementation have allowed Ipsos to recalibrate and expand the framework in ways that are still more inclusive and widely applicable.

Learning 1: Complexity Must Be Welcomed

Complexity has pros and cons for those implementing interventions in the sustainable development field. On the one hand, accepting complexity offers a deeper understanding of why an intervention does or does not work, yielding less pressure to achieve unrealistic program outcomes, and enabling the setting of realistic timeframes for achieving impact. On the other hand, when the complexities of the situation are accepted, it is much more challenging to design and implement an intervention in the first place. Here, a multi-disciplinary team with individuals who are able to grasp the big picture as well as the details of implementation are essential.

From an analytic perspective, in each of the case studies cited above as well as other studies, basic techniques (such as factor analysis and simple regressions) indicated analytic congruence and a sound hypothesis regarding the multi-dimensional nature of women's empowerment. However, to achieve more sophisticated understanding of how the multiple dimensions relate to each other, indicators and metrics that are tailored for such analytic solutions are required. Furthermore, in the time since the framework was developed, no longitudinal work was possible making it challenging to consider progress, although this will become possible from 2019 onwards as studies progress.

Learning 2: Inclusion of the Formal Workforce

Following the launch of the framework, it became immediately clear that interest in this type of conceptualization comes from many spaces, including business and politics in economically advanced countries. The application of the framework outside of low income communities and informal work environments made clear that the concept of empowerment itself is universal, and could be used to help those working to empower women in more advanced labor markets.

The framework requires re-working to accommodate these settings. While some metrics are universally applicable, others were initially designed to accommodate primarily very low income and informal employment contexts. Specifically, a new framework needed to include a perspective on the workplace and indicators such as opportunity for progression, pay, and experience of workplace harassment and redress. For women in public life, the framework should include, for example, the ability to participate in national-level politics free from gender-based harassment by the media.

Learning 3: Looking Beyond the Individual Dimension

Finally, it is critical to note that most women's empowerment policies, campaigns, and programs take place in the "individual" arena. In other words, they focus on women themselves, and what individual women can do to become empowered. A clear example of this, self-efficacy, or confidence, is a major area within women's empowerment receiving significant attention and investment. Studies repeatedly demonstrate that confidence both drives and is driven by the "objective realities" of empowerment—a women's education, rights, and access to services. However, while confidence is proven to be an important factor in a woman's journey to empowerment, a singular focus on confidence can mean that interventions sometimes leave out other important pieces of the empowerment picture.[12]

12 Jones, M. *Women's Empowerment is About More than Women: Re -conceptualizing Empowerment to Emphasize Cultural Norms,* Ipsos Understanding Society – Women Matter – Forthcoming, April 2019.

The most effective programs the Ipsos Sustainable Development team has observed are those that are not focused just on the behavior of women, but that also focus on the broader context. For example, multiple studies have found that programs achieved significant shifts in the treatment of women through their engagement of men in respecting a woman's capabilities and her contributions to the household, economy, and community. Rights and equalities should be owned by societies as a whole: making the disadvantaged primarily responsible for reducing that disadvantage may generate incremental progress but not fully realized solutions. Just as achieving racial equality shouldn't be the sole responsibility of racial minorities, gender equality shouldn't be something women have to take on alone: men should be brought along in this journey if the complete agency of women is going to be realized.

Re-conceptualizing Women's Empowerment

These overall learnings and ongoing usage have enabled Ipsos to undertake a data- and use-driven update of the women's empowerment framework *(Figure 2: 12-Dimension WE Framework).* The new framework incorporates a new "work" dimension which can be applied in both formal and informal markets, and is supported by an indicator and metric set refined to facilitate a greater range of analytic approaches.

It is only via continued engagement with and the practical application of such frameworks that society can continue to understand the true core of the challenge of women's empowerment at both granular and macro levels. Ipsos is proud to work within and alongside the women's empowerment community to push the agendas of accepting complexity, bringing whole societies along, and—of course—embodying the principles of good measurement.

Figure 2: 2019 Framework

	ARENAS OF EMPOWERMENT			
	INDIVIDUAL	HOUSEHOLD	WORK	COMMUNITY
REALITY	• Education and skills • Access to goods and services • Access to technology • Individual legal rights • Bodily rights	• Influence over assets and decisions • Physical and emotional safety • Ability to enter and exit freely	• Work inside and outside of the home • Available work opportunities • Pay and income • Respect for role	• Participation in community activities • Participation in political life • Ability to move freely and safely
SELF-PERCEPTION	Do women **feel**: • Free and able to make choices about education, work, goods and services, daily life? • In control of their circumstances and future?	Do women **feel**: • Confident about making decisions for the household? • Able to express opinions within their household? • Respected and safe?	Do women **feel**: • Confident that they can do their job well? • That they have equal access to the work opportunities? • Treated with respect in their roles?	Do women **feel**: • Able to participate in community activities and organizations? • Free to participate in political life? • Respected and safe in their community?
NORMS	**Should** women: • Have equal access to education, the workforce, legal rights, goods, public and private and services, and technology?	**Should** women: • Participate equally in household decision-making? • Be safe in their household, able to enter and exit freely?	**Should** women: • Have equal access to opportunities and benefits? • Enjoy equal expectations and respect?	**Should** women: • Be equal contributors to community and public life? • Be treated respectfully in community and public life?

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