



UNIVERSITY OF  
OXFORD



EMORY  
UNIVERSITY

# Measuring Women's Empowerment in National Surveys

Hazel Malapit<sup>1</sup>

Philippine Institute for Development Studies, Manila | August 14, 2024

<sup>1</sup>International Food Policy Research Institute

With Greg Seymour, Jessica Heckert, Agnes Quisumbing, Ruth Meinzen-Dick, Florencia Paz, Simone Faas, Emily Myers, Cheryl Doss, Sheela S. Sinharoy, Erin R. Johnson, Yuk Fai Cheong, Kathryn M. Yount, Md. Zahidul Hassan, Md. Imrul Hassan, Sudhindra Sharma, Pankaj Pokhrel, Mónica Dardón Sagastume, Shelton S. E. Kanyanda, Wilbert D. Vundru, Talip Kilic, and Heather Moylan

# Why measure empowerment?

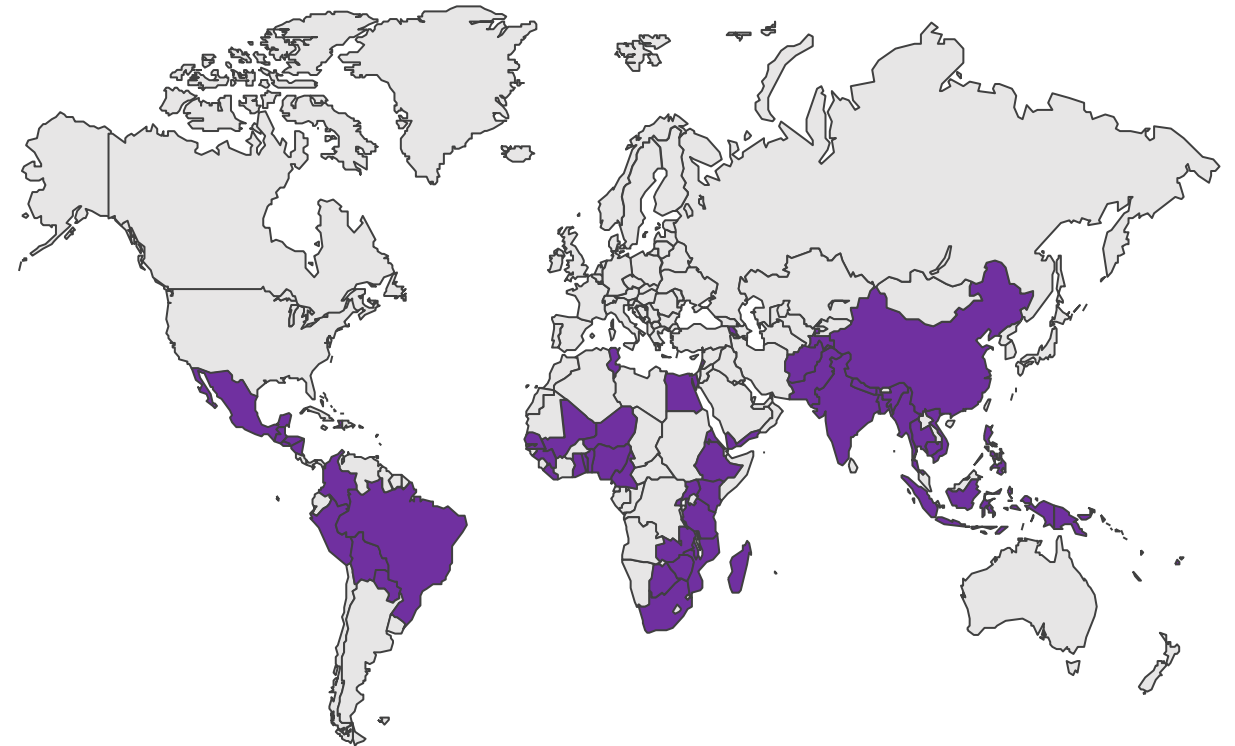
- Adoption on **women's empowerment** and **gender equality** as SDG5 recognizes the **intrinsic value** of both and increases the need for **performance monitoring**
- Lessons from poverty measurement (Atkinson 2019)
  - Metrics matter if they **motivate**, **monitor**, and **shape policy**



# Why WEMNS?

- Tremendous growth in women's empowerment metrics since 2010
- Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) and adaptations now used by 256 organizations in 62 countries (May 2024)
- But:
  - WEAI primarily focuses on agriculture
  - Requires long questionnaire
  - Not specifically aligned to SDG monitoring

## Global adoption of WEAI (2012-2022)



## An opportunity to implement women's empowerment metrics at scale



- A lean instrument, co-developed by IFPRI, WB-LSMS, Emory University, and Oxford University, aligned with the 50x2030 Initiative to Close the Agricultural Data Gap
  - Multi-partner effort that seeks to bridge the global agricultural data gap by transforming country data systems across 50 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America by 2030
- Instrument aligned with SDG 5 (women's empowerment and gender equality) and other relevant SDGs
- Suitable for use by national statistical systems and multi-topic household surveys



**Data Analysis and Technical Assistance, Bangladesh**  
**National Statistical Office, Malawi**

**Vox Latina, Guatemala**  
**Interdisciplinary Analysts, Nepal**



# Process of developing WEMNS

Stakeholder consultations (virtual)  
Review of SDG indicators, questionnaires  
Virtual workshop to discuss questionnaires with stakeholders  
Pilot countries chosen: Bangladesh, Malawi, Nepal



Cognitive interviews and questionnaire pilot  
2 wave phone survey (Bangladesh, Malawi, Nepal)  
Guatemala added as a pilot country  
1 wave phone survey (Guatemala)  
Psychometric analysis in between and after 2 rounds



Questionnaire development  
Face-to-face survey: late 2022 Bangladesh, Malawi Nepal  
Early 2023 Guatemala  
Psychometric validation  
Index construction

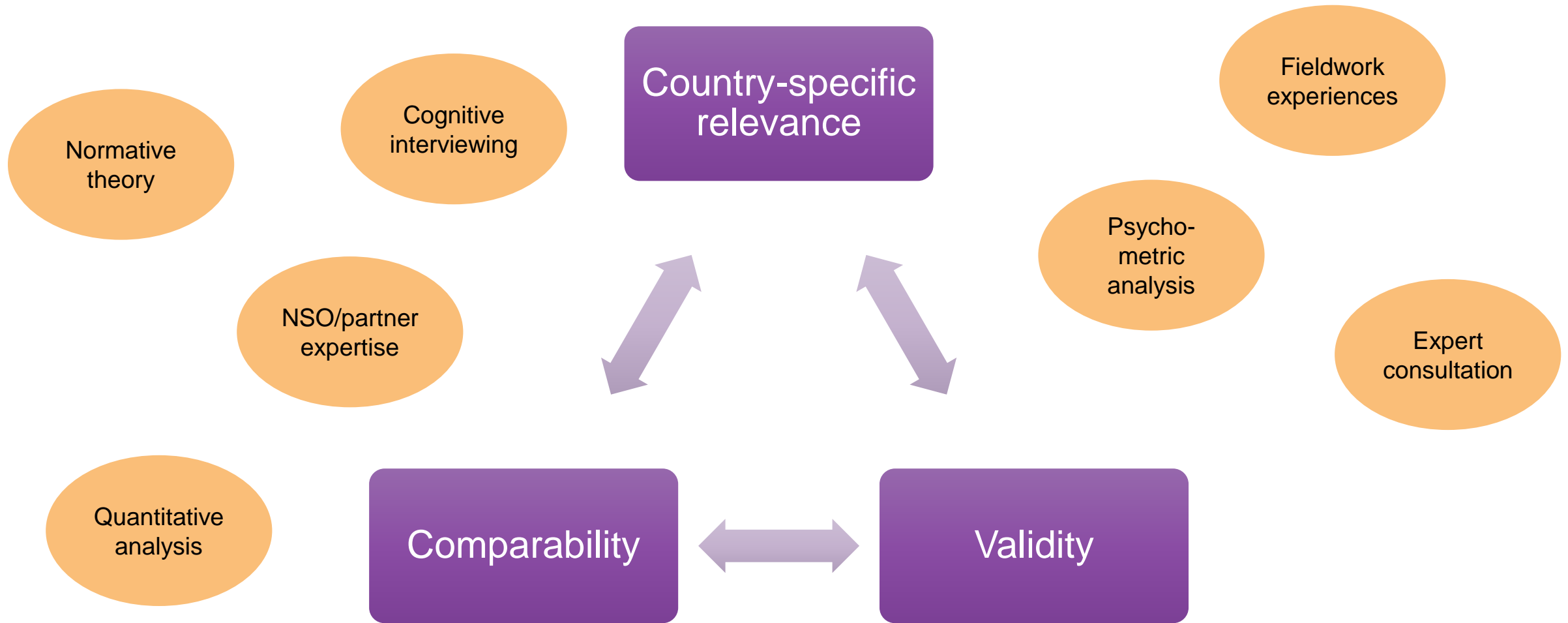
# WEMNS questionnaire, indicators, and SDG linkages

| Survey module                            | Indicator (# of required items)                                 | Related SDG Target(s) |
|--|---|-----------------------|
| Paid and unpaid activities               | Influence over time allocation (6-12)                           | 5.4                   |
| Participation and leadership             | Participation in organizations (5)                              | 5.5                   |
|  | Leadership in organizations (0-5)                               |                       |
|  | Support for women's community engagement* (5)                   |                       |
| Life transitions and awareness of rights | Endorsement of women's freedom in livelihood choices* (5)       | 5.a                   |
|  | Endorsement of women's freedom in family formation choices* (4) | 5.3                   |
| Financial services and credit            | Use of financial services (4)                                   | 1.4, 9.3              |
|  | Access to credit (4)  |                       |
| Property ownership                       | Legally documented ownership (6)                                | 1.4.2                 |
|  | Secure tenure rights (2)  |                       |
|  | Secure transfer rights (4)                                      |                       |
| Decision-making                          | Influence in spending decisions (2)                             | 1.4                   |
|  | Influence in own health decisions (1)                           | 5.6.1                 |
| Information and communication technology | Use of information and communication technology (2)             | 5.b                   |
| Sexual harassment                        | Rejection of women's subjection to sexual harassment* (5)       | 10.3                  |

**Does not support calculation** of related SDG indicators (except potentially for 1.4.2). Estimated interview time is around **15 minutes**.

\* Indicator only used for women; **55-66 items** required for **women**; **36-47 items** required for **men**.

# Development of indicators and a multidimensional index





# Conceptual justification

## Intrinsic agency

---

Assessing one's power requires **critical consciousness** and awareness of inequalities

Critical reflection allows individuals to become aware of their **ability to make choices** to change their lives

Power **within**

## Instrumental agency

---

Ability to make **important household decisions** is the most common measure of agency

Expanded to include choices about **time allocation** (time-use agency)

Power **to**



## Collective agency

---

Critical component of women's empowerment **beyond the household**

Considerable investment in **group-based** development approaches

Power **with**

## Agency-enabling resources

---

Material, human, and social resources that **enhance** individuals' ability to exercise choice

# WEMNS domains and indicators

## Intrinsic agency

---

Endorsement of women's freedom in livelihood choices

Endorsement of women's freedom in family formation choices

Rejection of women's subjection to sexual harassment

## Instrumental agency

---

Influence over time allocation

Influence in spending decisions

Influence in own health decisions



## Collective agency

---

Participation in organizations

Leadership in organizations

Confidence in women's/men's community engagement

## Agency-enabling resources

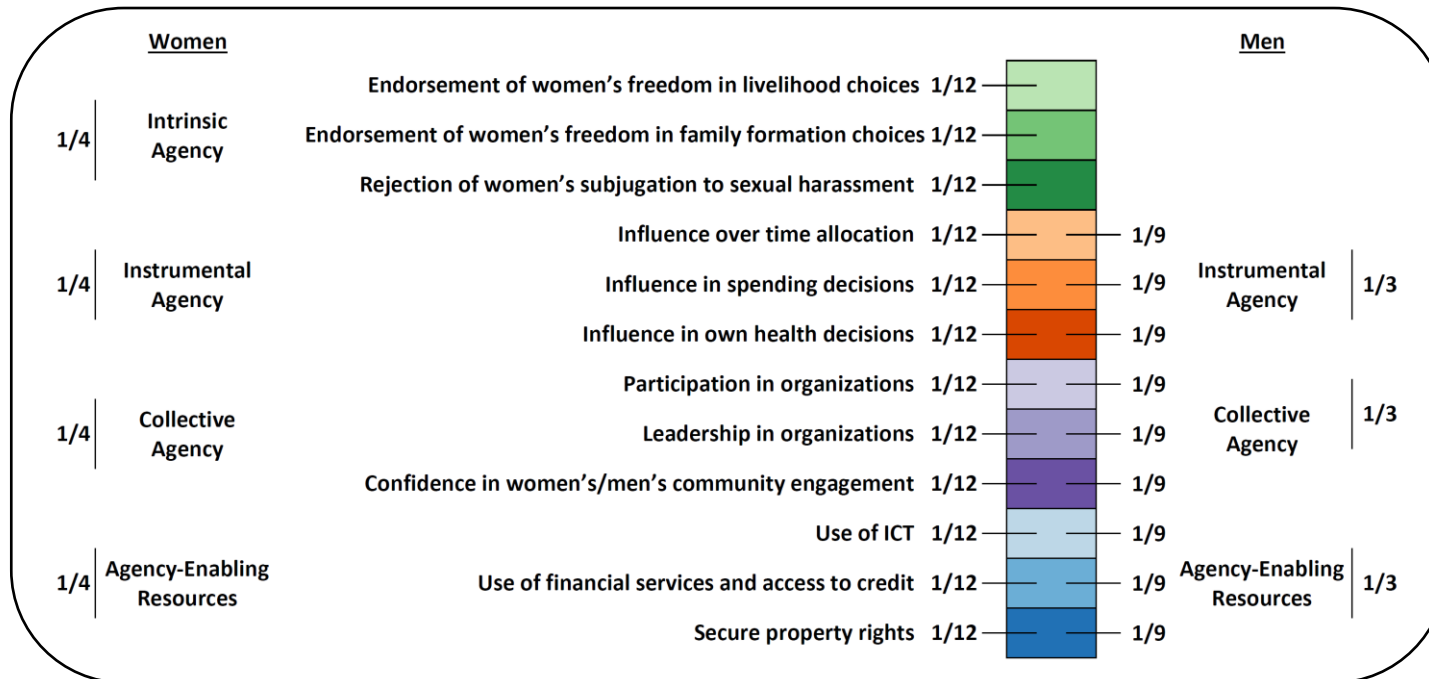
---

Use of ICT

Use of financial services and access to credit

Secure property rights

# How does WEMNS measure empowerment?



**12 indicators** used for women; **9 indicators** used for men

Each domain is **equally weighted**, and so are the indicators within each domain

**Dual-cutoff counting methodology**  
(Alkire and Foster, 2011)

**Step 1:** Identify respondents as **constrained or unconstrained** in each indicator (based on indicator-specific cutoff)



**Step 2:** Identify respondent respondents as **empowered** if they are **unconstrained** in at least 2/3\* of the weighted indicators

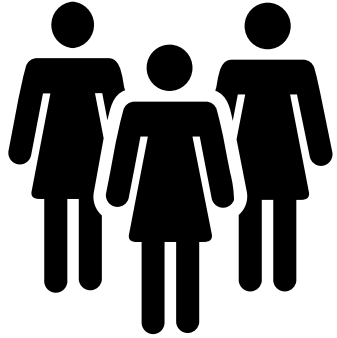
\* To be re-evaluated once we have nationally representative data.



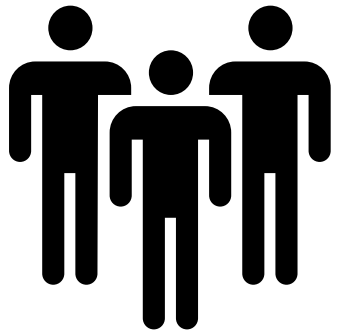
# Results from pilot surveys in Bangladesh, Malawi, Nepal, and Guatemala



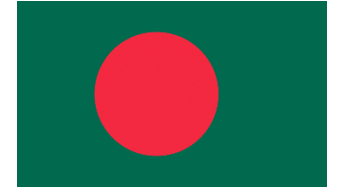
# Snapshot of results from Bangladesh pilot survey



- 88.6% of women are **disempowered**
- Disempowered women are **constrained** on average in **54% of the weighted indicators**



- 59.7% of men are **disempowered**
- Disempowered men are **constrained** on average in **47% of the weighted indicators**



**Women are substantially less empowered than men in the pilot sample**

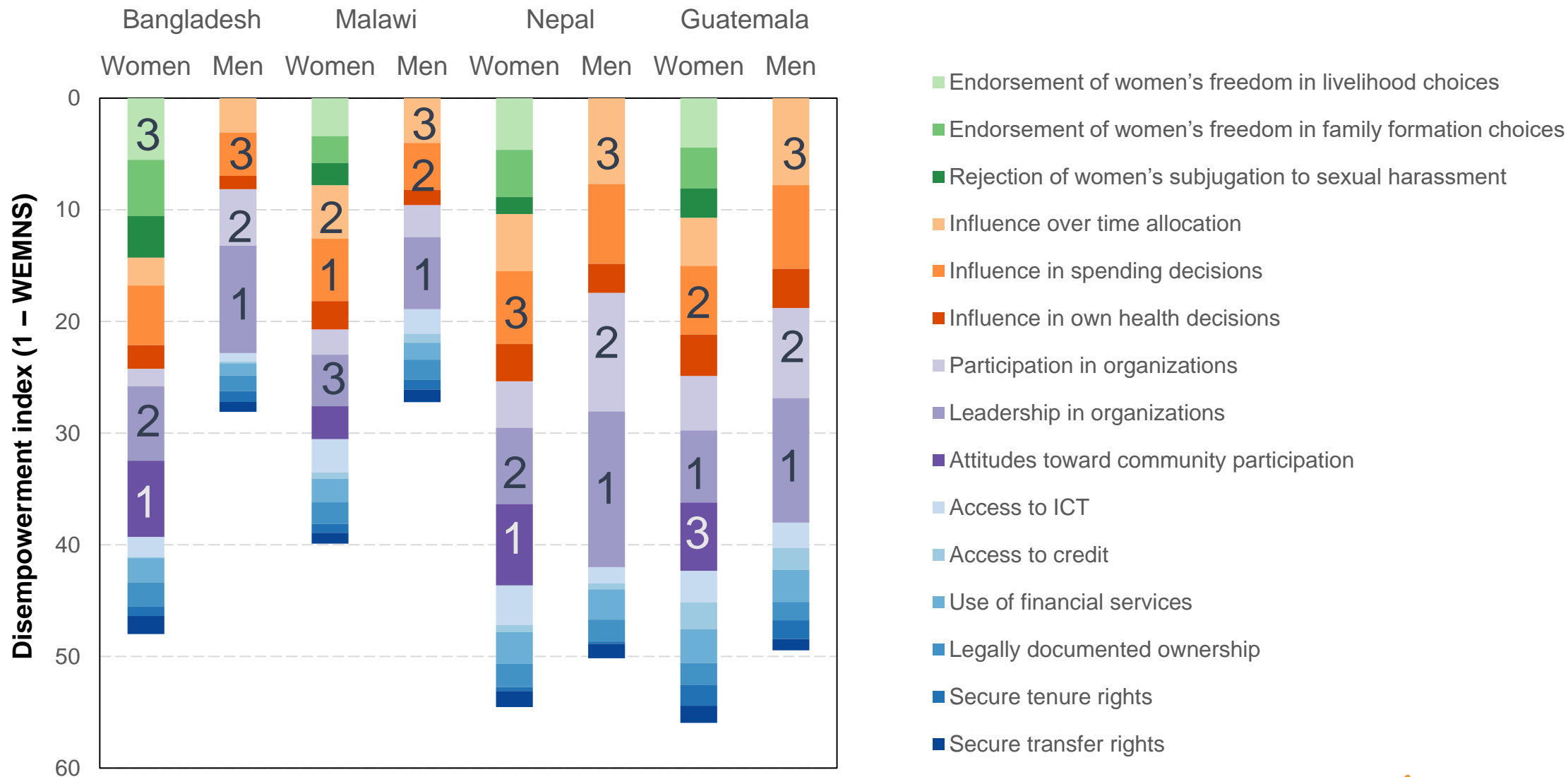
# Aggregate results in pilot samples

70% empowerment cutoff

|  | Bangladesh  |             | Malawi      |             | Nepal       |             | Guatemala   |             |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|  | Women       | Men         | Women       | Men         | Women       | Men         | Women       | Men         |
| <b>Incidence (headcount ratio) of disempowerment (H):</b> Share of people identified as disempowered                         | 88.6        | 59.7        | 77.8        | 54.2        | 90.9        | 86.5        | 91.7        | 84.7        |
| <b>Intensity of disempowerment (A):</b><br>Average share of weighted indicators in which disempowered people are constrained | 0.54        | 0.47        | 0.51        | 0.50        | 0.60        | 0.58        | 0.61        | 0.58        |
| <b>WEMNS Score: <math>(1 - H \times A)</math></b>  | <b>0.52</b> | <b>0.72</b> | <b>0.60</b> | <b>0.73</b> | <b>0.46</b> | <b>0.50</b> | <b>0.44</b> | <b>0.51</b> |
| Number of observations   | 797         | 797         | 787         | 773         | 809         | 802         | 796         | 779         |

# Aggregate results: Contributions to disempowerment

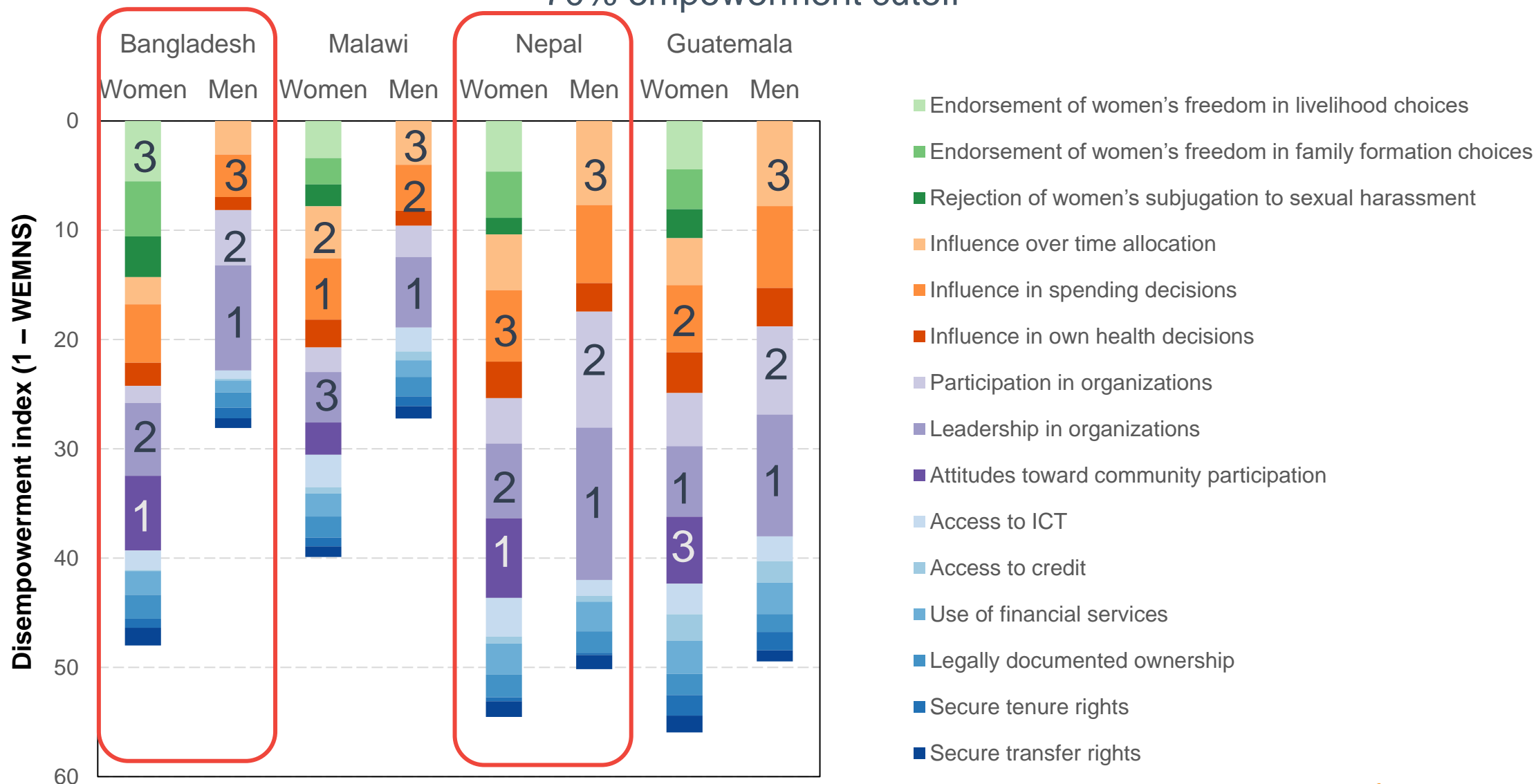
70% empowerment cutoff



Note: Disempowerment index = 1 - WEMNS score

# Aggregate results: Contributions to disempowerment

70% empowerment cutoff



Note: Disempowerment index = 1 - WEMNS score



# Conclusions

- WEMNS is a streamlined tool for measuring women's empowerment in multitopic surveys that cover rural and urban areas, as well as a range of livelihood strategies
- Multidimensional index allows for a range of comparisons: across and within countries, across time
- Current uptake: FAO's rural agricultural surveys (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania), Tanzania MoA, migration survey in Honduras, CGIAR Agro-ecology initiative in India



**Thank you!**

**Additional materials available on the WEAI Resource Center**

<https://weai.ifpri.info/wemns/>

- WEMNS questionnaire
- Guidance on indicator calculation
- Still to come: Stata .do files, CAPI code, etc.

**IFPRI Discussion Paper:** <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/measuring-womens-empowerment-national-surveys-development-womens-empowerment-metric>

**For technical support:** [IFPRI-WEAI@cgiar.org](mailto:IFPRI-WEAI@cgiar.org)



# WEMNS

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT  
METRIC FOR NATIONAL  
STATISTICAL SYSTEMS