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How do agricultural development projects empower women? Linking strategies with expected outcomes

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Abstract: Increasing numbers of development agencies and individual projects espouse objectives of women's empowerment, and there is a growing body of conceptual and empirical work on how to define and measure empowerment. What is missing is an evidence base on how and how much agricultural development projects can contribute to empowerment. What activities or combinations of activities contribute to empowerment, through what mechanisms, and in what contexts? While it will take time to fill that gap, this paper makes two contributions in that direction. First, it develops a framework for clarifying the objectives of development projects that differentiates between projects that seek to reach, benefit or empower women. Next, the paper identifies and analyzes the strategies of 13 agricultural development projects that were designed to empower women. Strategies are analyzed in terms of activities undertaken and domains of empowerment targeted. While strategies vary across projects, they have several characteristics in common that would be expected to contribute to empowerment.

Key words: Women's empowerment, agricultural development, projects, gender strategies, monitoring and evaluation

Introduction

There is an emerging consensus within the international development community that gender equality and women's empowerment are important goals from a human rights perspective, as well as for achieving a range of economic and social development objectives such as improved food security, child nutrition and education, and women's health (Kabeer 2010; Quisumbing 2003; Smith et al. 2003; World Bank 2011; Sraboni et al. 2014; Cunningham et al. 2015; van den Bold, Quisumbing, and Gillespie 2013; Malapit and Quisumbing 2015; Corroon et al. 2014; Gates 2014). There is evidence that expanding women's opportunities—particularly in access to health, education, and labor markets—as well as their rights and political participation decreases gender inequality and accelerates development (Duflo 2012). More recently, development policy

makers and practitioners have recognized the importance of women's empowerment as a means to enhance agricultural production and reduce rural poverty. Accordingly, many organizations have incorporated empowerment objectives and integrated activities designed to empower women into their agricultural projects and programs (World Bank 2015). To be able to monitor progress toward achieving these goals, many organizations have made investments in improving the ways in which women's empowerment is defined and measured at the individual as well as the national level (Alkire et al. 2013).

Because empowerment is both multidimensional and very personal, numerous definitions exist. A commonly used definition proposed by Kabeer is "an expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices, in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (1999, 437). Kabeer (1999) argued further that there is a gap between the understanding of empowerment as a process, and more instrumentalist forms of advocacy that have required the measurement and quantification of empowerment. In Kabeer's definition, the ability to exercise choice encompasses three dimensions: resources (defined to include not only access but also future claims to material, human, and social resources), agency (including processes of decision making, negotiation, and even deception and manipulation), and achievements (well-being outcomes).

According to a recent review, "while there have been improvements in some areas, overall progress towards women's empowerment and gender equality is halting and inconsistent" (Head et al. 2014, 5). Despite their contribution to and dependence on agriculture, women face significant constraints in their ability to access and control productive resources and opportunities that are important to agriculture-based livelihoods (FAO 2011; Kilic, Winters, and Carletto 2015). Relative to men, women are less likely to own land or livestock, adopt new technologies, use credit or other financial services, or receive education or agricultural extension services. Within their households, women in general play a limited role in household decision making and have little say in how household income is used (Head et al. 2014). Women also face significant time and mobility constraints relative to men (Johnston et al. 2015; van den Bold, Quisumbing, and Gillespie 2013).

The growing commitment to supporting women's empowerment in agriculture is encouraging, and efforts are underway to operationalize it. However, rigorous evidence on whether and how specific agricultural development investments empower women is limited. To address this conceptual and empirical gap, this paper proposes a framework for classifying projects' gender approaches based on whether projects are designed to reach, benefit, or empower women. The framework reflects how thinking about gender integration has evolved over time and is consistent with empirical evidence from past projects that integrated gender but often fell short in terms of benefitting and empowering women (Johnson et al, 2017). The paper goes on to examine the gender strategies of a set of projects that were explicitly designed to empower women. The purpose of the analysis is to explore how and through which mechanisms projects intend to empower women. Both the framework and the strategy analysis can be useful for project designers who want to integrate empowerment objectives in their projects. By better matching interventions to expected outcomes, they can also support more rigorous evaluation design and synthesis.

Clarifying strategies to empower women

As evidence grows about the importance of women as key agents in agriculture, food security and nutrition, more agricultural development projects are striving to address gender; and some even include women's empowerment as a direct or indirect objective. Yet projects with stated goals for women's empowerment vary greatly in their objectives, activities, and ways of measuring success.

There is no consensus on how to classify or compare approaches to gender in agricultural development activities. Some distinguish between gender-blind, gender-responsive (or -sensitive), gender-equitable, and gender-transformative projectsⁱ; others between projects that address practical needs versus strategic gender needs.ⁱⁱ While these terms are helpful to differentiate between project goals or objectives, on their own they don't offer much insight into what changes are intended, how they are expected to be achieved, or how these changes are being measured. This is a major shortcoming in terms of learning since identifying "what works" requires a precise definition not only of whether something worked (the outcome) but also of what was done (the intervention).

We propose that clarifying the gender approach requires looking beyond the stated objective to the set of activities the project undertakes to achieve those objectives (i.e., the strategy), and the ways it proposes to measure its outcomes (indicators). We identify three basic approaches: reaching women, benefitting women, and empowering women. (Figure 1).ⁱⁱⁱ

A strategy focusing on **reaching** women emphasizes engaging women in project activities, and tracks progress in terms of participation, for example measuring number of women who attend meetings or receive training, percent of women in groups formed or supported by the project, or percent of women with access to extension or other services provided by the project. To ensure that women participate, efforts are often made to identify and alleviate gender-based constraints to participation—for example by changing the time or place of meetings, forming women-only groups, or hiring women staff in the implementing organization or as lead farmers or extension agents. Projects may also use quotas requiring that a percentage (typically 30 percent) of participants be female.

Such projects may not intend to stop at reach—so their stated objective may include benefit or empower—but if the activities and the indicators focus at the output level, it will be a challenge for such projects to go beyond reach. While tracking and facilitating women's participation may be important, programs that only record the number of female participants may miss important intrahousehold and community dynamics that might prevent women from taking advantage of new knowledge or opportunities or dilute or redistribute program benefits away from women. In such cases, women could end up being negatively affected if they pay the costs associated with participation, especially in terms of time, without receiving any of the benefits. Enforcing participation quotas in such cases could exacerbate the problem if women are not able to decline to participate due to project, household or community pressure.

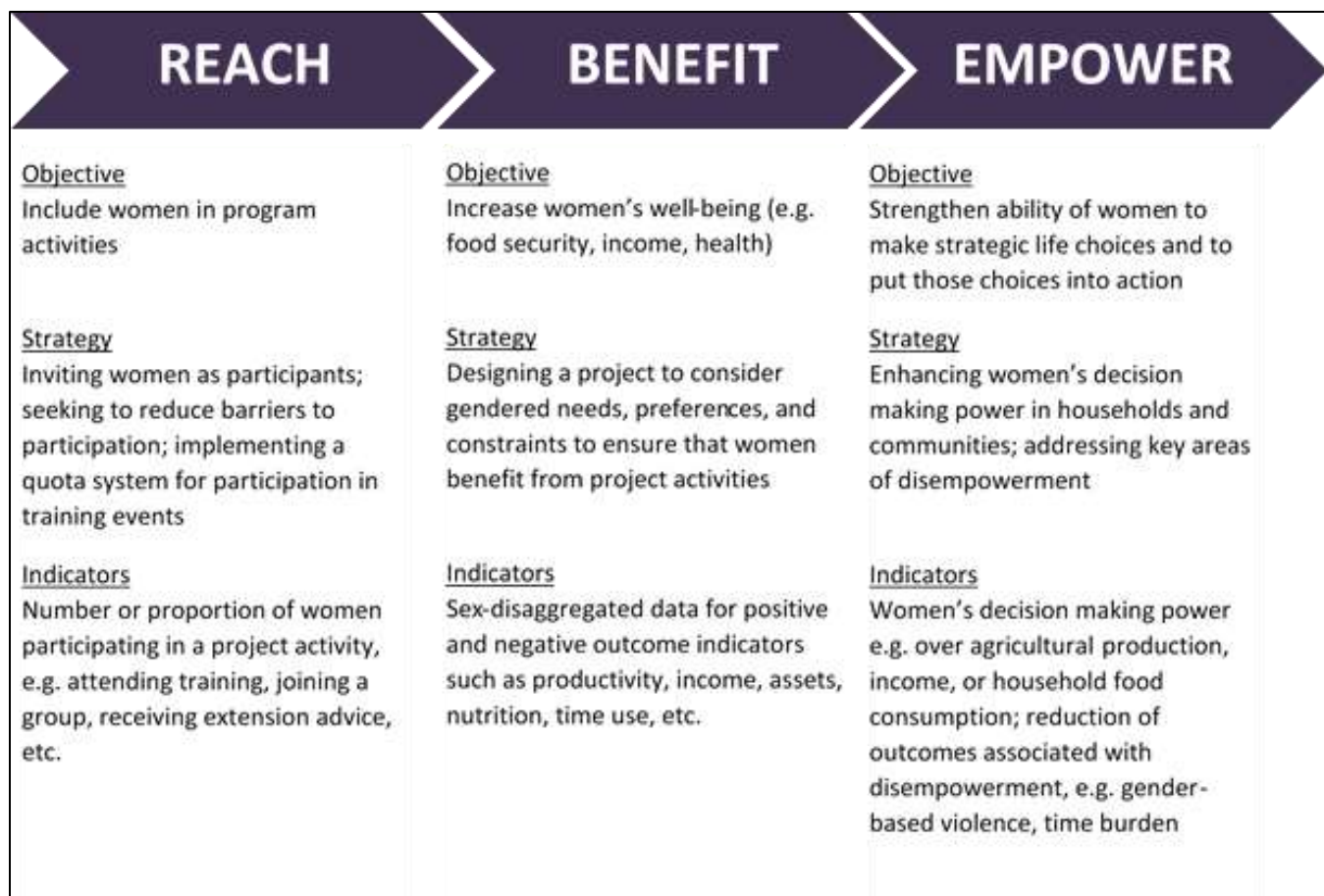


Figure 1: Project approaches to women

Source: Authors.

If a project strategy is focused on **benefitting** women, the project design, implementation and evaluation should be focused on ensuring that whatever outcomes the project is seeking—reduced hunger, increased income, greater resilience—are captured by women. This requires going beyond reaching women, to ensure that the project interventions will deliver benefits that women themselves value. For example, if a project reaches 100 women with training, is that information useful to the women? Projects may focus exclusively on women or they may target men and women. Targeting the “household” without differentiating between men’s and women’s differential ability to participate in and benefit from the project may make it harder for women benefit. Even those projects that target female-headed households are missing the majority of women who live in households with men. Projects that do not collect sex-disaggregated outcome data will be unable to demonstrate benefits. Demonstrating benefits is more challenging than demonstrating reach because benefits must be attributed to the project using an appropriate impact evaluation methodology. While it is generally recognized that projects designed with women’s needs and constraints in mind may be more effective at benefiting women, projects focused exclusively on women may fail to consider appropriate roles for men, thus risking backlash (Goodman and Kaplan 2017).

Empowering women involves strengthening their ability to make strategic life choices and to put those into action. Empowerment indicators are also outcomes, however they are different from outcomes measured under benefits. Empowerment measures could include outcomes that are inherently empowering (e.g., women's agency), inherently disempowering (e.g., gender-based violence, time burden) or indicators of women's position relative to men (e.g., degree of control over income, participation in joint decision making, gender-asset gap).

It is often expected that projects that lead to improvements in women's agricultural production, income, or nutritional status will begin to reduce underlying inequities between men and women. A growing body of evidence suggests that this does not happen automatically. A series of assessments of the impacts of agricultural development projects on women's assets found that while some projects succeeded in increasing women's use, control, and ownership of assets (a key indicator of empowerment related to resource control and participation in household decision making), they rarely succeeded in narrowing the gender asset gap (Johnson et al. 2016; Santos et al. 2014; van den Bold et al. 2015; Quisumbing et al. 2013; Roy et al. 2015). Similarly, even when projects succeeded in increasing women's income, they did not necessarily increase women's control of that income and rarely increased women's control of overall income at the household level (Santos et al. 2014; Quisumbing et al. 2013). Whereas increasing the income that women earn would be considered "benefiting" women, if women do not have increased control over how this income is used, a project would not be "empowering" women.

Empowerment may be the sole objective of a project; however, projects often seek to both benefit and empower women, because these objectives may be mutually reinforcing. Benefits to women may not be sustainable without increasing women's bargaining power within the household, and changing the underlying balance of power between men and women may be easier and less prone to backlash against women if it is accompanied by material benefits that can be shared by other members of the household, including the men. Conversely, projects exclusively focused on benefiting women may fail to consider appropriate roles and benefits for men, and may not be accepted by men (or women!) in the household or community.

Simply reaching women does not ensure that they will benefit from a project, and even if women benefit (e.g. from increased income or better nutrition), that does not ensure that they will be empowered (e.g. in control over that income or greater participation in decision making). Empowerment may not necessarily require reach and benefit approaches. Some projects focus directly on shifting gender norms and attitudes, such as those that aim to change attitudes towards gender-based violence, and may be targeted to the community, particularly to influential community members, rather than to individual women. Similarly, some "reach" activities—including and counting women—can be a powerful way to increase women's access to information, social networks, and confidence. In all cases, to be able to test a project's theory of change and see whether it is achieving its objectives, the approach to gender must be explicit and the objectives, strategies, and indicators aligned.

Measuring reach is generally the easiest and cheapest: counting number of women who attend project-sponsored events or use project services. It may be somewhat more expensive to measure benefits (e.g. increased incomes or nutrition), but there are standard indicators and methods. Measuring empowerment effects of projects has been constrained by lack of widely-

accepted indicators and methods. However, that is changing with the development and testing of indicators to measure empowerment. The following section draws on one such initiative to align empowerment objectives with strategies and indicators

What strategies are projects using to empower women?

The reach, benefit, empower (RBE) framework presented in the previous section suggests that projects that are not designed specifically to empower women are unlikely to do so. To see what a project designed to empower women looks like, we analyze the empowerment strategies of 13 projects that are part of the Gender, Agriculture, and Assets project (GAAP2). GAAP2 was designed to develop and test a measure of women's empowerment. To quantitatively measure women's empowerment, GAAP2 is developing a project-level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index, or pro-WEAI. This index builds on the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), which was developed by IFPRI, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, and USAID to monitor progress toward women's empowerment in the US government's Feed the Future Initiative (Alkire et al. 2013). To measure women's empowerment in agriculture at the level of a project, pro-WEAI expands on the five domains of the original WEAI—input into production, access to resources, control over income, leadership, and time use—to include additional domains that projects with explicit empowerment objectives identified as important. Based on consultation with the projects in the GAAP2 portfolio and others, the additional domains that are being piloted for inclusion in the pro-WEAI are physical mobility, intrahousehold relationships, individual empowerment, gender-based violence, and nutrition. Revisions have also been made to some of the questions in the original five domains to make them more sensitive to the types of changes that projects seek to make. To test pro-WEAI, the draft modules are being integrated into the impact assessment plans of each of the 13 projects. Projects received additional funding and technical support to develop, test, and integrate pro-WEAI and conduct complementary qualitative validation research.

GAAP2 projects were identified through a competitive process. In response to a call for expressions of interest in August 2015, more than 80 applications were received. Of those, a review panel of gender and impact evaluation specialists ultimately selected 13 (Table 1).^{iv} Key selection criteria for individual projects included a convincing strategy to empower women and a sound evaluation design that would permit assessment of impacts on men and women in general, and on women's empowerment more specifically. In addition to the project-level criteria, attention was paid to the composition of the overall portfolio, in particular to how projects clustered around the two main agricultural objectives (income and nutrition) and intervention areas (crops and livestock). Geographical considerations also played a role. The 13 selected projects, located in South Asia and Africa south of the Sahara, are being implemented by a range of development organizations.

Table 1: Objectives and strategies of projects in the GAAP2 portfolio

Project acronym	Project name	Implementer and evaluator	Country	Project modality	Project goal	Project objective	Project approach
3D4AgDev	Farmer Participatory Rapid Prototyping via 3-D Printing for Improved Labor-Saving Innovations for Women Smallholders in Africa	National University of Ireland–Galway	Malawi	Crops	Income	To harness user-driven innovation with women innovator groups to design, develop, deploy, and ultimately disseminate labor-saving agricultural tools for smallholder women	Works with innovator groups to transition prototypes of tools into final products and develop profit-sharing rural enterprises for women smallholders
ANGeL	Agriculture, Nutrition, and Gender Linkages	Ministry of Agriculture (Bangladesh) and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)	Bangladesh	Crops	Nutrition	To pilot alternative approaches to integrating agriculture, nutrition, and women's empowerment, the most effective of which will be scaled up.	Three approaches are being implemented in different combinations: facilitating production of nutrient-rich food, conducting high-quality behavior change communication (BCC), and undertaking gender sensitization activities
AVC	Impact Evaluation of the Bangladesh Agricultural Value Chains Program	DAI and IFPRI	Bangladesh	Crops	Income and nutrition	To increase agricultural output and income, and improve food and nutrition security, through strengthened agricultural value chains	Conducts trainings aimed at building farmers' capacity in the use of improved seed varieties and cultivation practices along with basic training on gender and nutrition issues and provision of promotional discounts to incentivize technology adoption
CRS	Feed the Future Nigeria Livelihoods Project	Catholic Relief Services and Gender Innovation Lab of the World Bank	Nigeria	Crops and livestock	Income and nutrition	To provide vulnerable households with the skills and resources needed to effectively engage in the local economy to reduce poverty and malnutrition	Sets up a variety of women's groups (producer, savings, safe spaces, caregiver), engages with men and community leaders to create an enabling environment for women, provides vulnerable women with income transfers, and provides individualized support to households from a trained community liaison

Project acronym	Project name	Implementer and evaluator	Country	Project modality	Project goal	Project objective	Project approach
FAARM	Food and Agricultural Approaches to Reducing Malnutrition	Helen Keller International (HKI) and University of Heidelberg	Bangladesh	Crops and livestock	Nutrition	To reduce undernutrition among women and young children through a food-based dietary diversification strategy and to increase the status of women within the household	Intervention based on HKI's enhanced homestead food production model involves training rural women's groups in vegetable gardening, fruit tree production, and poultry rearing, along with nutrition and hygiene
FFH/Grameen Foundation	Building Resilience of Vulnerable Communities in Burkina Faso	Grameen Foundation and Brigham Young University	Burkina Faso	Crops and livestock	Income and nutrition	To increase the resilience of vulnerable communities in disaster-affected regions by building women's economic empowerment, and to strengthen women's capacity to make decisions about children's nutrition	Uses community-based women's savings groups as a sustainable platform for improving livelihoods through training, education on agriculture as a business, linkages to agricultural services, financing for common agricultural activities, nutrition education, and gender dialogues
Heifer	Empowerment, Resilience, and Livestock Transfers	Heifer International and Montana State University	Nepal	Livestock	Income and nutrition	To increase income, food security and nutrition, and women's empowerment, and improve aspirations, hope, and economic resilience among the chronically poor by building physical, human, and social capital	Provides women with livestock transfers and trainings related to nutrition, home gardening, and livestock management; forms self-help groups through which women receive empowerment training
iDE	Small-Scale Irrigation and Women's Empowerment in Northern Ghana	iDE and IFPRI	Ghana	Crops	Income and nutrition	To expand production of food during the lean season and reduce production risks during rainy seasons through small-scale irrigation, which will increase income, food security, nutrition, and health	Provides women access to motor pumps along with training, access to credit, and other agricultural inputs

Project acronym	Project name	Implementer and evaluator	Country	Project modality	Project goal	Project objective	Project approach
JP-RWEE	UN Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Ethiopia	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	Ethiopia	Crops and livestock	Income and nutrition	To reduce gender inequalities in pastoralist communities related to access to resources, credit, and financial services in order to improve household food security, women's decision making within the household, and women's participation in the community	Interventions include strengthening associations and cooperatives to offer financial products to women farmers, providing credit to women farmers, and giving women financial literacy and entrepreneurship training
TRAIN	Targeting and Realigning Agriculture to Improve Nutrition	BRAC and IFPRI	Bangladesh	Crops	Nutrition	To reduce undernutrition among women and children by increasing the availability of and access to a more diverse diet; improving child feeding, health, and sanitation practices; and focusing on empowering women directly	Project interventions include BCC, providing nutrition-sensitive agricultural extension services, and sensitizing men about gender issues
Trias	Evaluation of Women's Food Security Program for Impoverished Maasai Households	Savannas Forever and University of Minnesota	Tanzania	Livestock	Income and nutrition	To increase food security of semipastoralist communities through a more diversified and secure income from improvements in livestock	Builds capacity of pastoralists' organizations to provide entrepreneurship training, business skills training, and advocacy for women; forms savings and credit groups and female-only farms; provides training on household budgeting and gender awareness
WINGS	Women Improving Nutrition through Group-Based Strategies	Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) and IFPRI	India	Crops and livestock	Nutrition	To improve women's and children's diets and nutrition outcomes through increasing own consumption and income	Uses existing women's self-help groups to deliver BCC and training on nutrition-sensitive agricultural planning, and works with the community and public systems/institutions to ensure that services of public health and nutrition programs are available and accessible in the project area

Source: Johnson et al, 2017, p. 7-9

In terms of the RBE framework of the previous section, all projects in the portfolio aim to empower women. To see how they do this, and whether and how they also seek to reach and/or benefit women as part of the process, we need to analyze the specific empowerment strategies. Strategies were identified initially by reviewing project documents (e.g., the overall project proposal, the proposal submitted by the project to GAAP2, project presentation at the GAAP2 inception workshop) and were then shared with each project’s GAAP2 team for confirmation^v.

Activities to empower women

The analysis of project empowerment strategies identified 11 specific activities that projects were using (Table 2).^{vi} These activities, many of which on their own could be used to reach or benefit women, can be grouped into four activity areas:

Table 2: Activity areas and specific activities to empower women in GAAP2 projects

Activity area	Specific activity	Main link(s) to RBE framework	Number of projects using the activity as part of their strategy
Provide goods and services	Direct provision of goods/assets to beneficiaries	Reach and benefit; possibly empower.	7
	Direct provision of services to beneficiaries		5
	Indirect provision by supporting availability, quality, or access	Benefit; possibly empower	2
Strengthen organizations	Form/strengthen groups or other organizations (such as enterprises)	Reach; possibly benefit or empower	8
	Form/strengthen platforms or networks that link organizations	Reach; possibly benefit or empower	1
Build knowledge and skills	Agricultural training and extension	Reach; possibly benefit	10
	Business and finance training		6
	Nutrition education		8
	Other training		4
Influence gender norms	Awareness raising about gender issues and their implications	Possibly reach; empower	3
	Community conversations to identify community solutions to gender issues	Possibly reach; Empower	8

Adapted from: Johnson et al, 2017, p 13

Provision of goods and services includes the direct provision of goods, generally through asset transfer programs targeted at women, and services, most commonly credit. It also includes indirect provision, whereby a project makes the good or service more available in communities. An example would be JP-RWEE’s work with local institutions to increase the willingness and ability of lenders to provide credit to women. Activities in this area would reach and benefit women (assuming the goods and services are of value to women), and could also be empowering if they change women’s position relative to men’s, for example in reducing the gender-asset gap, or providing information or legal aid services that enable women to obtain rights to property.

Strengthening organizations (formal and informal) plays an important role in reaching target beneficiaries and delivering other project activities. Projects work to form new groups as well as to strengthen existing groups. Projects work with many types of groups, the most common being farmer/producer groups and credit/savings groups. While often used to reach women, activities in this area can also benefit them if the groups are the avenues for providing access to goods and services. WorldVeg, the only project to use platforms or networks of organizations, uses them to connect women to vegetable technologies and information on improved nutritional behavior as well as water, sanitation, and hygiene. Other projects also have nested levels of groups. For example, some of the iDE mixed-sex farmer groups are further broken down into smaller “trust” groups of five farmers each to receive an additional loan to purchase a motor pump. The 3D4AgDev project is planning to form social enterprises to promote technologies developed in the project. To the extent that women’s participation in organizations breaks restrictions on their mobility, provides them with access to information and public services that they can claim, and builds their social networks, strengthening organizations can be an important avenue for women’s empowerment (Brody et al. 2015).

Building knowledge and skills, mainly through training, is a mainstay of most development interventions. As might be expected from agricultural projects, agricultural training and extension is the most common form of capacity building, though implementation modalities are quite diverse in content and in form. Most of our projects train women; in Bangladesh, however, agricultural extension is typically provided to men, so TRAIN and ANGeL provide it to both men and women in the same household. Conversely, nutrition education, which is typically provided to women, has been broadened to include men, with the goal of improving understanding and strengthening joint decision making within households (empowerment objectives). Grameen Foundation, JP-RWEE, and CRS provide financial and business training. At its most basic, training is a reach activity. If the content of the training is useful, training also provides benefits. Some training, such as on rights or how to access government services, can also be empowering.

Influencing gender norms and attitudes through sensitization programs is an explicit part of activities in 10 projects. Although in many cases women are the targets of these activities, in all cases men and boys are involved. Awareness raising is a “one-way” approach based on the idea that making people aware of gendered attitudes and norms and their potentially harmful implications could lead to changes in attitudes and behavior. Community conversations are “two-way” exchanges in which community members and project staff identify and analyze issues and potential solutions together. Activities intended to influence gender norms and attitudes are the most explicitly aimed at empowering women.

The first three activity areas are standard components of agricultural development projects, though in some cases the way they are implemented has been changed to contribute to empowerment objectives. What distinguishes most of the projects we reviewed from many other agricultural development projects, even those seeking to benefit women, is the inclusion of a component on influencing gender norms and attitudes. Another important thing to notice in Table 2 (last column) is that projects are employing activities from multiple activity areas. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Toward project empowerment strategies

To go from activities to strategies, we map project activities to empowerment outcomes (Table 3). As part of GAAP2, projects agreed to measure empowerment using a common definition based on the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index WEAI (Alkire et al. 2013).

Modifications are intended to make the WEAI, originally designed for population-based surveys, more responsive for use in project context. The project- or pro-WEAI will have more domains and modules that are tailored to specific types of projects, but can be aggregated so that results are comparable with standard WEAI. The columns of Table 3 reflect the domains being considered for inclusion in pro-WEAI. The first five—production, access to resources, income, leadership and time—are part of the standard WEAI. The others—which relate to mobility, intrahousehold relations, gender-based violence, individual empowerment, and nutrition—were added in consultation with the project teams, to provide indicators of other types of empowerment. The initial ideas for additional domains were identified and agreed upon during the GAAP2 inception workshop after which small teams with content specialists developed indicators and integrated questions into the survey modules to collect the data.

The first thing to notice about Table 3 is that projects tend to target multiple domains of empowerment (last column). Production, access to resources, income, leadership, intra household relationships and nutrition are the most common. Mobility and gender-based violence are targeted by projects based in South Asia. These results suggest that projects recognize the complexity of empowerment and do not expect that targeting just one aspect will make a meaningful difference.

The second thing to notice is that projects target some domains of empowerment such as production, access to resources and nutrition with activities from multiple activity areas. While the specific combinations vary by project, and depend on a range of factors including the project context, scope and budget, in nearly all cases the projects combine activities from an area focused on individual capacities and resources (A and D in Table 3) with activities focusing on the social and institutional context (B and D). This suggests that projects recognize that both must be addressed to have a durable effect on empowerment. Using multiple activities to target a domain of empowerment is consistent with findings of Stern, Jones-Renaud, and Hillesland (2016) in the WEAI interventions guide which was developed to help implementers translate findings from WEAI pilots into practice, and with other studies that have looked at features of projects that were considered successful in contributing to women's economic empowerment (Doss, Bockius-Suwyn, and D'Souza 2012).

Table 3 Project empowerment strategies (activity areas mapped to empowerment domains), by cluster

Agric. objective	Project	Production	Access to resources	Income	Leadership	Time	Mobility	Intrahousehold relations	Gender-based violence	Indv. empowerment	Nutrition	Domains	Activity areas
Income	3D4AgDev	A B C		A B	B C	A C				B		5	3
Nutrition	ANGel	C	D	D			D	D	D		C D	7	2
	FAARM	C	A D		B		B	D			C D	6	4
	TRAIN	C D	A	C		D		D			C D	6	3
	WINGS	B C	B C	C	B			D	D		C	7	3
Income and nutrition	AVC	A D	A D	D				D				4	2
	CRS	B C	A B	B C	B					C	C	6	3
	FFH	C	A B C D		B			D			C	5	4
	Heifer	A C	A B	C	B			D			C D	6	4
	iDE	A B	A		B	A						4	2
	JPRWEE		A C	D	C D					C		4	3
	Trias	B C	A B C	D	B				D			5	4
	WorldVeg	A B D	D	C			D	D			B C D	6	4

A Provide goods and services
 B Strengthen organizations
 C Build knowledge and skills
 D Influence gender norms

Source: Johnson et al, 2017, p. 16; * FFH changed its name to Grameen Foundation

As the strategy analysis suggests, many of the GAAP2 projects are complex interventions that involve layering different platforms for program delivery—for example, layering nutrition-sensitive interventions on top of existing agricultural service delivery platforms. This layering makes these interventions more challenging to implement, which makes organizational capacity crucial to project success.

Conclusions

As development agencies and individual projects espouse objectives of women’s empowerment, we need a clearer understanding of how this goal can be achieved effectively. There has been little systematic work on mechanisms by which interventions can enhance women’s empowerment, let alone on measuring the effects of different types of interventions on empowerment.

The first lesson from this exercise is the need to distinguish between reach, benefit, and empowerment (RBE) as objectives of agricultural development projects. Simply including women does not necessarily benefit them, and even activities that benefit do not necessarily empower. To be effective, projects should be clear about their objectives related to women and make sure that their activities and indicators of success are consistent with that objective. Without this, there is a real risk that projects will nominally espouse empowerment objectives, but not implement strategies to empower women, or measure and learn from whether they are achieving these stated objectives. Such a “bandwagon effect” is problematic for at least two reasons. First, such projects are unlikely to meet the stated objectives in their areas of operation. Second, if there are enough agricultural development projects that claim to empower women and do not deliver such outcomes, it can discredit agricultural development as a strategy for women’s empowerment. The RBE framework can be used by project developers, funders, evaluators, and others to screen projects for their likely gender impacts.

To get a sense of what it means to design an agricultural development project to empower women, we analyzed and characterized the strategies of 13 projects with explicit objectives and plausible strategies to empower women. Strategies contained activities from four main activity areas:

- Direct and indirect provision of goods and services
- Forming or strengthening groups, organizations, platforms, or networks that involve women
- Strengthening knowledge and capacity through agricultural extension, business and finance training, nutrition behavior change communication, and other training
- Changing gender norms through one-way awareness raising or two-way community conversations about gender issues and their implications

While individual activities could be used for multiple objectives (e.g., to reach, benefit and or empower), it was the combination of activities that constituted the empowerment strategy in the projects we reviewed. Most projects used activities from at least three of the four activity areas.

Despite the diversity of projects in the portfolio, the analysis revealed that the strategies have some similar characteristics that are consistent with their stated empowerment objectives. First, most projects (10 of 13) contain activities specifically designed to influence gender norms and

attitudes. This is not common among agricultural development projects, and confirms that these projects are tackling head on the kinds of social and institutional constraints that have prevented interventions from doing more to benefit and empower women.

Second, these projects target multiple domains of empowerment. Most projects target a core set of six empowerment domains—production, access to resources, income, leadership, intrahousehold harmony, and nutrition—with some variation by region. Targeting multiple domains suggests that projects recognize the multi-faceted nature of empowerment.

Third, these projects target each domain with multiple, mutually-reinforcing activities. In general, projects combine activities to address both the individual (capacities and resources) and social-institutional constraints to empowerment.

Finally, all of these projects have committed to measuring empowerment. All projects in the GAAP2 portfolio will have rigorous, mixed-methods impact evaluations to quantify and understand their contributions to a range of outcomes including women's empowerment. Until those results are available, we cannot say which, if any, of the strategies is truly effective in increasing women empowerment. In the meantime, the fact that the strategies are consistent with the conceptual and empirical literature on women's empowerment make them strong candidates for success and useful examples for project designers, implementers and funders who are committed to empowering women through agricultural development. However, examining a wider set of projects with the RBE framework presented in this paper can reveal where many other projects—even those that espouse empowerment objectives—are only reaching, or possibly benefitting, women. The better projects can articulate their objectives, design strategies that align with them, and measure the outcomes with suitable indicators, the more they will be able to add to the evidence base about what works to reach, benefit, as well as empower women.

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Notes:

ⁱ Gender-blind efforts typically do not acknowledge the role of gender in different social contexts and ignore the different ways that men and women engage with productive resources; these efforts often end up exacerbating gender inequalities. Gender-aware approaches have an understanding of the different needs and interests of men and women and develop activities to ensure that both men and women benefit and that neither is harmed, but does not deliberately challenge unequal relations of power. Gender transformative refers to an approach that explicitly engages both women and men to examine, question, and change those institutions and norms that reinforce gender inequalities. These definitions are drawn from several sources including Manfre and Rubin 2012, Gates Foundation 2012, Caro 2009, and Rubin, Manfre, and Nichols Barrett 2009.

ⁱⁱ Strategic gender needs are those (usually externally) identified to overcome women's subordination to men; practical gender needs are identified by women within their subordinate position, usually related to survival (Moser 1989).

ⁱⁱⁱ For more discussion of the concepts of reaching, benefiting, and empowerment in the context of agricultural development projects, see <http://a4nh.cgiar.org/2016/11/29/reach-benefit-or-empower-clarifying-gender-strategies-of-development-projects/>.

^{iv} Two projects, 3D4AgDev and CRS, eventually withdrew from the GAAP2 portfolio. However, our analysis includes these two projects to illustrate the diversity of gender strategies adopted by agricultural development projects.

^v For a more detailed analysis of project strategies, see Johnson et al., 2017.

^{vi} In the text we use project acronyms to refer to the projects. Full names of the project can be found in Table 1.