

Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development

Anju Malhotra, PhD
International Center for Research on Women

Sidney Ruth Schuler, PhD
JSI Research and Training Institute

Carol Boender
Consultant, JSI Research and Training Institute

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Introduction

The World Bank has identified empowerment as one of the key constituent elements of poverty reduction, and as a primary development assistance goal. The Bank has also made gender mainstreaming a priority in development assistance, and is in the process of implementing an ambitious strategy to this effect. The promotion of women's empowerment as a development goal is based on a dual argument: that social justice is an important aspect of human welfare and is intrinsically worth pursuing, and that women's empowerment is a means to other ends. A recent policy research report by the World Bank (2001a), for example, identifies gender equality both as a development objective in itself, and as a means to promote growth, reduce poverty, and promote better governance. A similar dual rationale for supporting women's empowerment has been articulated in the policy statements put forth at several high-level international conferences in the past decade (e.g., the Beijing Platform for Action, the Beijing+5 declaration and resolution, the Cairo Programme of Action, the Millennium Declaration, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW]).

Yet to date neither the World Bank nor any other major development agency has developed a rigorous method for measuring and tracking changes in levels of empowerment. In the absence of such measures, it is difficult for the international development community to be confident that their efforts to empower women are succeeding and that this important Millennium Development Goal will be achieved.

This paper is a first step in the attempt to outline the most promising methodological approaches to measuring and analyzing women's empowerment. We review major strands of theoretical, methodological, and empirical literature on empowerment from the fields of economics, sociology, anthropology, and demography, and attempt to summarize what we know and don't know about what leads to women's empowerment, and its consequences for development and poverty reduction. As a first effort at covering this vast and interconnected topic, we have been selective in limiting ourselves to literature that is at the core of the discourse on *women's* empowerment and gender relations, leaving as a next step its connection with a broader range of literatures and discourses of relevance. Based on our analysis, we provide some concrete recommendations regarding where the field stands in defining, conceptualizing, and measuring empowerment, and what might be next steps for utilizing and refining existing frameworks, collecting data and conducting analyses, and incorporating approaches from related literatures. Thus, this review attempts to provide the following:

1. an indication of the different ways in which empowerment has been conceptualized;
2. a critical examination of some of the approaches that have been developed to measure and track changes in women's empowerment;
3. an examination of some of the ways in which the effects of policies and programmatic interventions to promote women's empowerment have been measured;

4. a summary of the evidence on how women's empowerment affects important development outcomes such as health, education, fertility behavior, income levels, etc.

The paper begins with a presentation of definitional and conceptual issues. Section II discusses measurement issues and the challenges to operationalizing women's empowerment empirically. Section III reviews the empirical evidence from studies that have examined women's empowerment as the outcome of interest as well as an influencing agent on other development outcomes. Section IV provides some conclusions and recommendations.

SECTION I. CONCEPTUALIZING WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

How Should Empowerment Be Operationally Defined?

"Empowerment" has been used to represent a wide range of concepts and to describe a proliferation of outcomes. The term has been used more often to advocate for certain types of policies and intervention strategies than to analyze them, as demonstrated by a number of documents from the United Nations (UNDAW 2001; UNICEF 1999), the Association for Women in Development (Everett 1991), the Declaration made at the Microcredit Summit (RESULTS 1997), DFID (2000), and other organizations. Feminist activist writings often promote empowerment of individuals and organizations of women (Sen and Grown 1987; Jahan 1995; Kumar 1993) but vary in the extent to which they conceptualize or discuss how to identify it.

Another line of thought in development promotes social inclusion in institutions as the key pathway to empowerment of individuals and has at times tended to conflate empowerment and participation. Capitalism, top-down approaches to development, and/or poverty itself are seen as sources of disempowerment that must be challenged by bringing "lowers"—the poor and disenfranchised—(Chambers 1997) into the management of community and development processes. The growth of civil society and participatory development methods at both macro and meso levels of society are usually proposed as the mechanisms by which empowerment takes place (Friedmann 1992; Chambers 1997). For example, Narayan et al. (2000a) focus on state and civil society institutions at both national and local levels, including informal institutions such as kinship and neighborhood networks. Institutions at the micro level, such as those of marriage and the household, are not considered part of the state or of civil society, but interpersonal gender dynamics within the household are considered part of the equation of social exclusion and in need of directed efforts at change.

Bennett (2002) has developed a framework in which "empowerment" and "social inclusion" are closely related but separate concepts. Drawing on Narayan (2002), Bennett describes empowerment as "the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them." Social inclusion is defined as "the removal of institutional barriers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the access of diverse individuals and groups to assets and development opportunities." Bennett notes that both of these definitions are intended to be operational, and describe processes rather than end points. The empowerment process, as she characterizes it,

operates “from below” and involves agency, as exercised by individuals and groups. Social inclusion, in contrast, requires systemic change which may be initiated “from above.” As Narayan (2002) and Ravallion and Chen (2001, in their discussion of “pro-poor growth”) also argue, systemic change is necessary to sustain empowerment over time. It is through the process of social inclusion that the “rules of the game” are modified and institutions transformed so that economic growth is widely shared. Bennett argues that the distinction between empowerment and social inclusion is important because the World Bank’s comparative advantage is at the system or policy level.

In general, women do not take a central place in much of the literature on social inclusion or empowerment. While clearly, the broad reference to empowerment as the expansion of freedom of choice and action, as articulated in the World Bank’s Sourcebook on Empowerment and Poverty Reduction (Narayan forthcoming 2002), applies to women as well as other disadvantaged or socially excluded groups, it is important to acknowledge that *women’s* empowerment encompasses some unique additional elements. First, women are not just one group amongst several disempowered subsets of society (the poor, ethnic minorities, etc.); they are a cross-cutting category of individuals that overlaps with all these other groups. Second, household and interfamilial relations are a central locus of women’s disempowerment in a way that is not true for other disadvantaged groups. This means that efforts at empowering women must be especially cognizant of the implications of broader policy action at the household level. Third, several of the authors whose work we review in this paper argue that women’s empowerment requires systemic transformation in most institutions, but fundamentally in those supporting patriarchal structures (Kabeer 2001; Bisnath and Elson 1999; Sen and Grown 1987; Batliwala 1994).

Development cooperation agencies have begun to focus on the development of indicators for assessing gender equality, and in some cases “empowerment,” and there is a growing body of literature in which efforts have been made to clearly define the concept of empowerment. This literature emerges from both activist and research writings. A diverse body of research has emerged on measuring empowerment and relating it to other variables of interest in international development. This research tends to take place at the interstices of the disciplines of demography, sociology economics, anthropology, and public health; it does not occupy a widely recognized niche in any academic field.

Consensus on Conceptualization

Given the diversity in the emphases and agendas in discussions on women’s empowerment, we found greater consensus in the literature on its conceptualization than expected. There is a nexus of a few key, overlapping terms that are most often included in defining empowerment: options, choice, control, and power. Most often these are referring to women’s ability to make decisions and affect outcomes of importance to themselves and their families. Control over one’s own life and over resources is often stressed. Thus, there is frequent reference to some variant of the ability to “affect one’s own well being,” and “make strategic life choices.” For example, G. Sen (1993) defines empowerment as “altering relations of power...which constrain women’s options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well-being.”

Batliwala's (1994) definition is in terms of "how much influence people have over external actions that matter to their welfare." Keller and Mbwewe (1991, as cited in Rowlands 1995) describe it as "a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination."

Also appearing frequently in definitions of empowerment is an element related to the concept of human agency— self-efficacy. Drawing mainly from the human rights and feminist perspectives, many definitions contain the idea that a fundamental shift in perceptions, or "inner transformation," is essential to the formulation of choices. That is, women should be able to define self-interest and choice, and consider themselves as not only able but also entitled to make choices (A. Sen 1999; G. Sen 1993; Kabeer 2001; Rowlands 1995; Nussbaum 2000; Chen 1992). Kabeer (2001) goes a step further and describes this process in terms of "thinking outside the system" and challenging the status quo.

Kabeer (2001) offers a useful definition of empowerment that effectively captures what is common to these definitions and that can be applied across the range of contexts that development assistance is concerned with:

"The expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them."

We employ this definition as a reference point in the present paper. Although brief, this definition is specific enough to distinguish it from the general concept of "power," as exercised by dominant individuals or groups. Kabeer's definition is especially attractive because it contains two elements which help distinguish empowerment from other closely related concepts (as discussed further below): 1) the idea of process, or change from a condition of disempowerment, and 2) that of human agency and choice, which she qualifies by saying that empowerment implies "choices made from the vantage point of real alternatives" and without "punishingly high costs."

Sifting through Terminology

One reason why the degree of consensus on the conceptualization of empowerment is not readily apparent in the literature is because of the variation in terminology used to encompass it. In this review, we do not limit ourselves to theoretical or empirical work using only the term "empowerment." The literature contains a range of terms, concepts, and data that may be relevant for assessing "empowerment"; for example, various studies have aimed at measuring women's "autonomy" (e.g., Dyson and Moore 1983; Basu and Basu 1991; Jeebhoy and Sathar 2001), "agency," "status" (e.g., Gage 1995; Tzannatos 1999), "women's land rights" (e.g., Quisumbing et al. 1999), "domestic economic power" (e.g., Mason 1998), "bargaining power" (e.g., Beegle et al. 1998; Hoddinott and Haddad 1995; Quisumbing and de la Briere 2000) "power" (e.g., Agarwal 1997; Beegle et al., 1998; Pulerwitz et al. 2000), "patriarchy" (e.g., Malhotra et al. 1995), "gender equality" (World Bank 2001a and 2000b), or "gender discrimination." Often there is no clear demarcation

between these terms. Mason (1998) and Mason and Smith (2000), for example, treat empowerment, autonomy, and gender stratification interchangeably. Similarly, Jejeebhoy (2000) considers autonomy and empowerment as more or less equal terms, and defines both in terms of women “gaining control of their own lives vis-à-vis family, community, society, markets.” In contrast, other authors have explicitly argued that autonomy is not equivalent to empowerment, stressing that autonomy implies independence whereas empowerment may well be achieved through interdependence (Malhotra and Mather 1997; Govindasamy and Malhotra 1996; Kabeer 1998).

Early studies of “women’s status” often covered aspects of empowerment without explicitly labeling 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 nexus of gender-related power differentials in the household, noting how important the family unit is to understanding the operation of gender in a society (Acharya and Bennett 1981). Acharya and Bennett also highlight the links between women’s economic roles and their control over resources and life options.

Similarly, “women’s empowerment,” “gender equality” and “gender equity” are separate but closely related concepts. The recent policy research report by the World Bank (2001a) employs the term “gender equality,” which it defines in terms of equality under the law, equality of opportunity (including equality of rewards for work and equality in access to human capital and other productive resources that enable opportunity), and equality of voice (the ability to influence and contribute to the development process). Gender equality implies “equivalence in life outcomes for women and men, recognizing their different needs and interests, and requiring a redistribution of power and resources.” Gender equity “recognizes that women and men have different needs, preferences, and interests and that equality of outcomes may necessitate different treatment of men and women” (Reeves and Baden 2000:10).

Notwithstanding the similarities in the concepts underlying many of these terms, we think that the concept of empowerment can be distinguished from others based on its unique definitional elements. As discussed above, the first essential element of empowerment is that it is a process (Kabeer 2001; Chen 1992; Rowlands 1995; Oxaal and Baden 1997). None of the other concepts explicitly encompasses a progression from one state (gender inequality) to another (gender equality). Much of the emphasis on empowerment as a process is found in the conceptual literature, but this understanding is also beginning to be incorporated into the frameworks of empirical studies. For example, even as Jejeebhoy (2000) considers autonomy and empowerment to be fairly similar, she argues that the former is a static state—and thus measurable by most available indicators—while the latter is change over time, and not so easily measurable.

The second element of empowerment that distinguishes it from other concepts is agency—in other words, women themselves must be significant actors in the process of change that is being described or measured (G. Sen 1993; Mehra 1997). Thus, hypothetically there could be an improvement in indicators of gender equality, but unless the intervening processes involved women as agents of that change rather than merely as its recipients, we would not consider it empowerment. However desirable, it would merely be an improvement in

outcomes from one point in time to another. The importance of agency in the discourse on empowerment emerges from “bottom up” rather than “top down” approaches toward development (Oxaal and Baden 1997; Rowlands 1995; Narayan et al. 2000a and 2000b). At the institutional and aggregate levels, it emphasizes the importance of participation and “social inclusion” (Friedmann 1992; Chambers 1997; Narayan et al. 2000a and 2000b) At the micro level, it is embedded in the idea of self-efficacy and the significance of the realization by individual women that they can be the agents of change in their own lives.

The Process of Empowerment

There are various attempts in the literature to develop a comprehensive understanding of empowerment through breaking the process down into key components. The specific components tend to differ depending on the orientation and agenda of the writer, but here as well there is greater consensus than we had expected. Kabeer’s (2001) understanding of “choice” comprises three interrelated components: “resources, which form the conditions under which choices are made; agency, which is at the heart of the process through which choices are made and achievements, which are the outcomes of choices.” The World Bank’s report on “Engendering Development” (2001a) defines rights, resources, and voice as the three critical components of gender equality. Chen (1992) describes “resources, perceptions, relationships, and power” as the main components of empowerment, and Batliwala (1994), characterizes empowerment as “control over resources and ideology.” UNICEF uses the Women’s Empowerment Framework constructed by Sara Longwe, which encompasses welfare, access to resources, awareness-raising, participation, and control (UNICEF 1994).

Resources and agency (in various forms and by various names, e.g., control, awareness, voice, power) were the two most common components of empowerment emphasized in the literature we reviewed. In many discussions, however, resources are treated not as empowerment per se, but as catalysts for empowerment or conditions under which empowerment is likely to occur. In the context of policy and evaluation, it may be more useful to think of resources as “enabling factors;” that is, as potentially critical inputs to foster an empowerment process, rather than as part of empowerment itself. And, in fact, many of the variables that have traditionally been used as “proxies” for empowerment, such as education and employment, might be better described as “enabling factors” or “sources of empowerment” (Kishor 2000a). As our review of measurement issues and empirical evidence illustrates below, although many empirical studies have used variables such as education and employment as proxies for empowerment, there is a growing understanding that this equation is problematic (Govindasamy and Malhotra 1996; Malhotra and Mather 1997; Kishor 1995; Mason 1998).

The second component, agency, is at the heart of many conceptualizations of empowerment. Human agency is a central concept in A. Sen’s (1999) characterization of development as the process of removing various types of “unfreedoms” that constrain individual choice and agency. Kabeer’s (2001) essay on women’s empowerment draws on Sen’s understanding of agency as well as his conceptualization of the links between individual agency and public action. Among the various concepts and terms we encountered in the literature on empowerment, “agency” probably comes closest to capturing what the majority of writers are

referring to. It encompasses the ability to formulate strategic choices, and to control resources and decisions that affect important life outcomes.

Some characterizations of empowerment have included an additional component, which Kabeer refers to as “achievements” and Longwe as “welfare.” And, in international policy processes, women’s empowerment is implicitly equated with specific (usually national-level) achievements such as political participation, legal reform, and economic security. In the context of evaluation, we would argue that achievements are best treated as outcomes of empowerment, not as empowerment per se (just as resources may be more usefully construed as enabling factors or catalysts for empowerment). Granted, one might question whether agency really amounts to empowerment if there is no meaningful result in terms of women’s status, strategic position, or welfare. But whether any empowerment indicator or form of agency (such as exercising control over decisions or resources) really amounts to empowerment in a particular context will always be an empirical question. As we note elsewhere, it may be possible to identify empowerment indicators that can be applied in a wide variety of contexts, but there will always be situations in which a particular indicator does not signify empowerment. As we will discuss later, this does not mean that the development of empowerment indicators is a futile task, only that the complexities of measuring empowerment must be taken into account in developing conceptual frames and research designs.

In identifying agency as the essence of women’s empowerment, we are not suggesting that all improvements in women’s position must be brought about through the actions of women themselves or that empowering themselves is the responsibility of individual women. There is ample justification for governments and multilaterals to promote policies that strengthen gender equality through various means, including legal and political reform, and interventions to give women (and other socially excluded groups) greater access to resources (e.g., World Bank 2001a). National and international institutions have the responsibility for ensuring the inclusion of disadvantaged populations socially, economically, and politically. The question is whether it is useful to describe all actions taken toward that end as “empowerment,” and we would suggest that it is not. The major reason for the emphasis on agency as the defining criterion is because of the many examples in the literature of cases in which giving women access to resources does not lead to their greater control over resources, where changes in legal statutes have little influence on practice, and where female political leaders do not necessarily work to promote women’s interests. Thus while resources—economic, social, and political—are often critical in ensuring that women are empowered, they are not always sufficient. Without women’s individual or collective ability to recognize and utilize resources in their own interests, resources cannot bring about empowerment.

Having argued that “agency” should be treated as the essence of empowerment, and resources and achievements as enabling conditions and outcomes, respectively, another caveat is necessary. While distinctions such as those between “resources, agency, and achievements” (Kabeer 2001) or “sources versus evidence” of empowerment seem clear at the conceptual level, it is not always easy to completely separate them in developing empowerment indicators. And too, a given variable may function as an indicator of women’s access to resources (or an enabling factor) in one context, of women’s agency in another, and may

represent an achievement in still other contexts. For example, microcredit programs and employment opportunities are often seen as resources for women's empowerment. But if a woman seeks to gain access to microcredit, or to get a job, then getting the job or joining the credit program might be best characterized as a manifestation of women's agency, and the benefits she draws as a result—income, discretionary spending, healthcare, etc—as achievements. In some analyses discussed in Section III, below, women's economic contribution is treated as an enabling factor and used to predict other outcomes such as control over important decisions and even the outcomes of decisions such as family size or contraceptive use. But in other contexts women's economic contribution would be more accurately described as a form of agency or, again even an achievement. Similarly, assets owned could function as sources of empowerment (e.g., Kishor 2000a) but they could also constitute evidence that empowerment had been achieved. The meaning of any empowerment indicator will always depend on its interrelationships with other variables.

Empowerment is a dynamic process. Separating the process into components (such as enabling factors, agency and outcomes) may be useful in identifying policy interventions to support empowerment, and for evaluating the impact of such interventions, but it is important to realize that a framework for research or evaluation of a specific policy or intervention will refer to only one phase of the process. Which phase it refers to will depend on the context, the interventions being assessed, and the outcomes of interest.

SECTION II: MEASURING WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Measuring Empowerment from a Universalist Perspective

As we move from a discussion of conceptualizing empowerment to measuring it, it is important to note that measures of empowerment must involve standards that lie outside localized gender systems and a recognition of universal elements of gender subordination (Sen and Grown 1987; Bisnath and Elson 1999; Nussbaum 2000). It is clear from the literature on gender and empowerment that the role of gender in development cannot be understood without understanding the socio-cultural (as well as political and economic) contexts in which development takes place. The concept of empowerment has meaning only within these specific contexts. At the same time, operational definitions (e.g., definitions embodied in indicators to be applied in the context of development assistance policies, programs, and projects) should be consistent with the spirit of international conventions to which countries providing international development assistance have been signatories. The approach based in universal human rights offers the best operational framework for this task.

Local structures of gender inequality are typically experienced as “natural,” and therefore may seem unalterable to actors in a particular social setting. Kabeer (2001) elaborates on this point drawing on Bourdieu's 1977 idea of “doxa”—the “aspects of tradition and culture which are so taken-for-granted that they have become naturalized.” When women internalize their subordinate status and view themselves as persons of lesser value, their sense of their own rights and entitlements is diminished. They may acquiesce to violence against them, and make “choices” that reinforce their subordinate status. For example, in her life cycle, a South Asian

woman may “graduate” from the comparatively subservient position of daughter-in-law to that of mother-in-law, and in this role she may dominate her son’s wife. Based on the “agency” criterion for describing something as empowerment, one might call this behavior empowered. As a mother-in-law, the woman gained the ability to exercise agency (in the form of power over another person), in a way that she could not when she was a young woman herself. But, we would argue against such a use of the term empowerment. The mother-in-law is acting within an inequitable gender system that severely constrains her ability to make strategic life choices. The system lets her exercise power, but only in ways that reinforce the system. This sort of agency is similar to what Kabeer (2001) describes as choices that reflect women’s consent and complicity in their own subordination. When they lack agency in a broader sense, women should not be considered to be making empowered choices.

Internalized subordination receives particular attention among writers on international education, informed by a Freirian perspective on raising the critical consciousness of the poor (Freire 1994[1973]). For example, Stromquist writes that empowerment includes cognitive and psychological elements: It involves “women’s understanding of their conditions of subordination and the causes of such conditions at both micro and macro levels of society.... It involves understanding the self and the need to make choices that may go against cultural and social expectations” (1993:14). Thus, universal standards are necessary to identify empowerment.

Multidimensionality and Existing Frameworks

As early as 1981, Acharya and Bennett noted that status is a function of the power attached to a given role, and because women fill a number of roles, it may be misleading to speak of “*the* status of women” (p. 3). Another early writer on the topic, Mason (1986), pointed out that the phenomenon of gender inequality is inherently complex, that men and women are typically unequal in various ways, and that the nature or extent of their inequality in different settings can vary across these different dimensions (as well by social setting and stage in the life cycle). Since that time, a number of studies have shown that women may be empowered in one area of life while not in others (Malhotra and Mather 1997; Kishor 1995 and 2000b; Hashemi et al. 1996; Beegle et al. 1998). Thus it should not be assumed that if a development intervention promotes women’s empowerment along a particular dimension that empowerment in other areas will necessarily follow. It may or may not.

Several different efforts have been made in recent years to develop comprehensive frameworks delineating the various dimensions along which women can be empowered. In Appendix A, we present the essential elements of the empowerment frameworks developed by selected authors. These frameworks employ different levels of specificity. For example, the CIDA (1996) framework includes four broad dimensions of empowerment, while Kishor’s (2000a) framework includes broad (e.g., valuation of women, equality in marriage) as well specific (e.g., lifetime exposure to employment) elements.

In Table 1, we synthesize and list the most commonly used dimensions of women’s empowerment, drawing from the frameworks developed by these various authors. Allowing

for overlap, these frameworks suggest that women's empowerment needs to occur along the following dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. However, these dimensions are very broad in scope, and within each dimension, there is a range of sub-domains within which women may be empowered. So, for example, the "socio-cultural" dimension covers a range of empowerment sub-domains, from marriage systems to norms regarding women's physical mobility, to non-familial social support systems and networks available to women. Moreover, in order to operationalize these dimensions, one should consider indicators at various levels of social aggregation -- the household and the community, as well as regional, national, and even global levels. In the table we group commonly used and potentially useful indicators within various "arenas" or spheres of life. Some of these indicators have been suggested within the frameworks referenced above, while others are a first effort on our part to "flesh out" this schematic for application in development assistance contexts.

Table 1. Commonly used dimensions of empowerment and potential operationalization in the household, community, and broader arenas.

Dimension	Household	Community	Broader Arenas
Economic	Women’s control over income; relative contribution to family support; access to and control of family resources	Women’s access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement and/or representation in local trade associations; access to markets	Women’s representation in high paying jobs; women CEOs; representation of women’s economic interests in macroeconomic policies, state and federal budgets
Socio-Cultural	Women’s freedom of movement; lack of discrimination against daughters; commitment to educating daughters	Women’s visibility in and access to social spaces; access to modern transportation; participation in extra-familial groups and social networks; shift in patriarchal norms (such as son preference); symbolic representation of the female in myth and ritual	Women’s literacy and access to a broad range of educational options; Positive media images of women, their roles and contributions
Familial/ Interpersonal	Participation in domestic decision-making; control over sexual relations; ability to make childbearing decisions, use contraception, access abortion; control over spouse selection and marriage timing; freedom from domestic violence	Shifts in marriage and kinship systems indicating greater value and autonomy for women (e.g., later marriages, self selection of spouses, reduction in the practice of dowry; acceptability of divorce); local campaigns against domestic violence	Regional/national trends in timing of marriage, options for divorce; political, legal, religious support for (or lack of active opposition to) such shifts; systems providing easy access to contraception, safe abortion, reproductive health services
Legal	Knowledge of legal rights; domestic support for exercising rights	Community mobilization for rights; campaigns for rights awareness; effective local enforcement of legal rights	Laws supporting women’s rights, access to resources and options; Advocacy for rights and legislation; use of judicial system to redress rights violations
Political	Knowledge of political system and means of access to it; domestic support for political engagement; exercising the right to vote	Women’s involvement or mobilization in the local political system/campaigns; support for specific candidates or legislation; representation in local bodies of government	Women’s representation in regional and national bodies of government; strength as a voting bloc; representation of women’s interests in effective lobbies and interest groups
Psychological	Self-esteem; self-efficacy; psychological well-being	Collective awareness of injustice, potential of mobilization	Women’s sense of inclusion and entitlement; systemic acceptance of women’s entitlement and inclusion

When sorted by sphere or level of aggregation (which we discuss more fully below), frameworks delineating dimensions of women's empowerment offer potential roadmaps for operationalizing and measuring women's empowerment. These frameworks have been important in highlighting the potential independence of the various areas within which women can be empowered—i.e., women can be empowered in the familial sphere without making similar gains in the political sphere. In terms of practical measurement, however, it is difficult to neatly separate the dimensions. For example, many aspects of economic or social empowerment overlap considerably with the familial dimension, as in the case of control over domestic spending or savings, or the limitations on mobility or social activities.

Empirical research has begun to show that in given settings, some dimensions of empowerment may be more closely interlinked than others. Kishor (2000a) conducted a factor analysis of several variables that may impact empowerment in Egypt. Among the ten empowerment dimensions that resulted from the analysis, some were comparatively better correlated than others. Dimensions did not all bear equally on the survival of women's children (measured by child mortality and immunization); only "women's lifetime exposure to employment" and "family structure" (residence with in-laws, etc.) affected both child survival outcomes. Jejeebhoy (2000) likewise found that, in India, decision-making, mobility, and access to resources were more closely related to each other than to child-related decision making, freedom from physical threat from husbands, and control over resources.

Because empowerment is multidimensional, researchers must use care in constructing index or scale variables relating to empowerment. Such variables may mask differential effects of interventions on distinct aspects of empowerment. Inappropriate combining of items relating to gender and empowerment may also mask differential effects of the component variables on outcomes of interest. Ghuman (2002), for example, critiques a logit regression analysis by Durrant and Sathar (2000), which found that mothers' decision-making autonomy on child-related issues demonstrated a weak, statistically insignificant effect on child survival. Ghuman points out that this finding was the result of a summative scale of items on mothers' decision-making about child-related issues such as schooling, illness matters, and punishment for misbehavior, but that these items varied greatly with respect to their individual associations with child survival. Thus, Durrant and Sathar found a weak effect because their aggregated scale items had different individual effects. Ghuman found that punishing children for misbehaving (which she links to women's reluctance to take on authority with respect to other child-related decisions) had an important negative association with child mortality. However, it is also true that a single indicator is not usually sufficient to measure even a specific dimension of empowerment (Kishor 2000b; Estudillo et al. 2001). Additional information is usually needed to interpret data on any given indicator.

Levels of Aggregation

Many writers have noted that because power relations operate at different levels, so does empowerment (Mayoux 2000; Bisnath and Elson 1999). However, exactly how these levels are defined varies. Economists, for example often differentiate between the micro and macro levels, but the macro level is generally meant to include market and political systems where as the micro level may include not only individuals and households, but also communities and

institutions (see Pitt and Khandker 1998; Rao 1998; Tzannatos 1999; Winter 1994; Narayan et al. 2000a and 2000b) When sociologists and demographers refer to the micro level, they usually mean the individual or the household while the macro level may include anything from the community to the polity. (Gage 1995; Jejeebhoy and Sather 2001; Kritz et al. 2000; Malhotra et al. 1995). Thus, while there is clarity at the highest and lowest levels of aggregation, this is less the case with the intermediate levels. This also means that in operationalizing empowerment, there is theoretical interest but less empirical attention to aggregations that fall in the middle, especially at the community level where institutional and normative structures such as family systems, infrastructure, gender ideologies, regional or local market processes, etc. are most likely to affect women's empowerment. It is often precisely at these intermediary levels that normative changes occur and where programmatic or policy interventions often operate.

Theoretically, the frameworks that delineate dimensions of empowerment can be operationalized at any level of aggregation. For example, the legal dimension can be measured in terms of individual women's knowledge and/or use of their legal rights, to representation of women's interests and concerns in community, regional, or national laws. Our review suggests, however, that in the studies to date, the political and legal dimensions tend to be operationalized at fairly high levels of aggregation (regional or national), while the familial, social, and economic dimensions are generally operationalized at the individual or household levels, with some limited efforts at considering these at the level of the community or institution. The psychological dimension of empowerment is rarely operationalized in empirical research at any level.

The most cutting-edge empirical research makes efforts to measure empowerment at multiple levels. Anthropological and qualitative studies are particularly adept at blending individual or household situations with the "meso" level institutional structures and normative conditions (Kabeer 1997, Mayoux 2001; Hashemi et al. 1996). Quantitative studies that have attempted multi-level analyses of empowerment have used both aggregations of individual/household data as well as direct measures of community levels characteristics (Kritz et al. 2000; Mason and Smith 2000; Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001). Generally these studies find that both individual and community level effects are important in determining empowerment or related outcomes. For specific outcomes, moreover, aggregate level effects may play a significantly greater role than individual level effects (Mason and Smith 2000; Jejeebhoy 2000; Kritz et al. 2000).

Research that blends theory with empirical work tends to focus on women's empowerment in their relationships within the household and local community. Much of this literature focuses on individual as opposed to collective empowerment and examines conjugal relationships and sometimes women's relationships with others in the household as well. The discourse on collective forms of empowerment emerges largely from the activist literature (G. Sen 1993). Oxaal and Baden (1997) argue that to the extent that mainstream development discourse views empowerment as an individual rather than collective process, it emphasizes entrepreneurship and self-reliance rather than cooperation to challenge power structures. The discourse on social inclusion also sees the potential for empowerment in a collective form, whether it is through political, economic, or social mobilization of groups. Narayan et al.

(2000a and 2000b) find that poor people's NGOs often lack transformational power, but that with capacity building, access to information, and increased accountability in both state and civil-society institutions, both groups and individuals can become empowered.

Community-level social norms, such as those constraining women's freedom of movement, access to economic resources, and "voice" in the local community, may become more egalitarian as a result of strategic collective action by groups of women. Examples include the anti-arak movement in south India and the collective actions by female street vendors who joined the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmedabad, India. Collective action in the social, economic, and political spheres (e.g., mobilization to end violence against women, unionization, advocating for certain laws) can also lead to empowerment in the form of expanded legal rights and political representation at various levels of society. Thus, organized collective action may alter policies and practices such that the ability to make strategic life choices is improved not only for the women who were directly involved in the bringing about the changes, but for other women as well.

But the normative structures that limit women's strategic life choices may also change through processes arising from individual actions in response to new situations and opportunities. For example, restrictions on women's freedom of movement and interactions with men who are nonrelatives may loosen as a result of microcredit programs or employment opportunities, and women's access to social networks outside the family may increase along with their presence in the public sphere. Regardless of whether they have been intentionally fostered through development policies (as opposed to being merely by-products of policies with other aims) such changes may eventually become manifest as "aggregate" shifts in women's position within family systems, or markets, and may represent a transformation in gender norms.

Kabeer (2001) argues that individual women may challenge structural inequalities when they act in ways inconsistent with gender norms, but that the impact of such actions tends to be limited. The "project" of women's empowerment, she believes, requires collective action in the public sphere. Notwithstanding the importance of collective action, we would argue that individual actions may bring about significant normative changes at the community level that can be accurately described as empowerment, depending on the social processes involved. According to sociological theories of diffusion, new ideas and practices often spread gradually without collective consciousness that fundamental change is occurring (Rogers 1995). At some "tipping point," however, the prevalence of new processes becomes great enough for there to be a revolution in norms as well as in the collective consciousness. For example, in rural Bangladesh in the early 1990s women who took up nontraditional jobs, adopted contraceptives, or traveled by themselves to health facilities before these behaviors were common were pioneers in the process of diffusion (Hashemi et al. 1996; Schuler et al. 1996). Gradually, other women did the same, and while women in these communities continue to suffer from gender inequity in many spheres of their lives, there has nevertheless been a significant change in terms of women's freedom of movement, their ability to exercise control over their own fertility, and their knowledge and involvement in the public sphere. These changes are widely recognized by men and women in the research communities. We

would characterize this process as “empowerment” even though the collective aspect developed more or less organically, rather than resulting from organized action.

Challenges to Measuring Empowerment

Empowerment Is Context-Specific

One of the major difficulties in measuring empowerment is that the behaviors and attributes that signify empowerment in one context often have different meanings elsewhere. For example, a shift in women’s ability to visit a health center without getting permission from a male household member may be a sign of empowerment in rural Bangladesh but not in, for example, urban Peru. Context can also be important in determining the extent to which empowerment at the household or individual level is a determinant of development outcomes. It could be argued, for example, that if investments in public health systems are strong, then women’s role as the intermediaries for their children’s health through better education or decision-making power in the household will be less important than when this is not the case.

The variation in the nature and importance of empowerment across contexts poses a challenge in terms of both consistency and comparability in measurement schemes. How important is context in defining empowerment in different settings? Does the context-specific nature of empowerment mean that we must constantly reinvent indicators to suit socioeconomic, cultural, and political conditions? What is the role of context in determining the relationship between women’s empowerment and development outcomes? How dependent is this statistical relationship on the choice of indicators and whether or not they are appropriate to the setting in question?

In the 1990s there have been a few pioneering efforts at sorting out some of these issues through empirical research (Mason and Smith 2000; Jejeebhoy 2000; Kritz et al. 2000; Schuler et al. 1995b; Hashemi et al. 1996). The body of work emerging from this research unequivocally confirms the importance of context in both defining and measuring the impact of women’s empowerment on development outcomes. Although not fully conclusive concerning several of the other challenges that context specificity represents, this work also sets the stage for exploring measurement and analytical schemes that can better address these challenges.

The group of “Status of Women and Fertility” studies conducted by Mason and her colleagues aimed for comparability in measuring women’s empowerment and its impact of reproductive behavior across five settings in Asia: India, Pakistan, Thailand, Philippines, and Malaysia (Mason and Smith 2000; Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001). Although there were small variations in wording to make each question appropriate to the country setting, there was an effort to employ similar indicators across countries and within 59 community settings in the five countries. In her 1998 analysis, for example, Mason is able to compare “economic decision-making power in the family” based on a scale constructed from six indicators that were collected relatively consistently across the five countries.

In this approach, contextual factors are brought in as important determinants at the analytical rather than the measurement stage. Thus, analyses from this set of studies include community level measures on family systems, marriage systems, religion and ethnicity, female participation in the work force, rates of child mortality, etc. Kritz et al. (2000) employ a similar approach by developing an index of the gender contexts in four communities using eight indicators, such as mean spousal age difference, percentage of wives in modern work, mean score on wives' physical mobility, and percentage of wives who control how to use income. A consistent set of findings from this approach is that the contextual factors are often more important in determining women's empowerment and its outcomes than individual-level factors. At the same time, there is inconsistency in the studies' findings on which particular contextual conditions are most empowering to women. Mason (1998:130) summarizes: "While our analysis suggests that the community context is very important for the empowerment of individual women, it also makes clear that the community conditions which empower women tend to be idiosyncratic rather than universal."

Studies that apply indicators across cultures can be useful for making international or inter-regional comparisons with reference to an external yardstick of power, women's status, or gender equity, but they raise the issue of how appropriate similar indicators are in measuring empowerment across settings. An alternative potential approach to addressing the challenges of context is to rely on a consistent conceptual framework for measuring empowerment and its effects, but to allow flexibility in the specific indicators used to define the key components of that framework across different settings. Any given context, at any given point of time can be seen as having behavioral and normative "frontiers," that need to be crossed for women to be empowered along a specific dimension, within a specific arena. Specifying these frontiers helps define the indicators of relevance to that particular context, at that particular time.

This is the approach that Schuler et al. (1995a and 1995b) advocate. In their work on Bangladesh, India, and Bolivia, Schuler and her colleagues relied on a common conceptual framework in which they specified the dimensions along which women's empowerment or its effects could vary. In measuring the dimensions, however, they used indicators relevant to each particular country and community setting. Their analysis also allowed for greater or lesser weight on certain dimensions as opposed to others across contexts. Hashemi and Schuler argue that initial groundwork through qualitative and exploratory methods, conceptual analysis, and stakeholder consensus through participatory processes is essential to establishing parameters that define empowerment in specific country and development project contexts (Hashemi et al. 1996).

This approach, however, does require a balancing act between the "universalist" principles around which empowerment must be conceptualized, and the localization of context-specific indicators. The underlying structures of gender inequality are often invisible to the actors in a particular social milieu; they are often experienced as "natural" and, as such, inalterable. And yet individuals find ways to exercise agency, and to control others, even in contexts where they are comparatively powerless. In exploring the viability of indicators and building stakeholder consensus through participatory processes, there is the danger that indicators may be "too" internally defined, reflecting the limited viewpoint of the actors.

The contextual nature of empowerment suggests that “universal” measures may be impossible. However further comparative research might reveal whether some empowerment indicators are “more universal” than others.

Difficulties in Measuring a “Process”

Many writers describe empowerment as a “process,” as opposed to a condition or state of being, a distinction that we have emphasized as a key defining feature of empowerment. However, as “moving targets,” processes are difficult to measure, especially with the standard empirical tools available to social scientists. In this section we discuss the major methodological challenges in measuring the process of women’s empowerment, including: the use of direct measures as opposed to proxy indicators, the lack of availability and use of data across time, the subjectivity inherent in assessing processes, and the shifts in relevance of indicators over time.

Some authors who have made efforts at empirically measuring empowerment have argued that as a process, it cannot be measured directly, but only through proxies such as health, education level, knowledge (Ackerly 1995). For example, Kishor (2000a) has argued that while the end product of empowerment can be measured through direct indicators, the process can be measured only through proxies such as education and employment. Several large-scale studies of relationships between gender and economic or demographic change have used proxy variables. However, an increasing body of research indicates that commonly used proxy variables such as education or employment are conceptually distant from the dimensions of gender stratification that are hypothesized to effect the outcomes of interest in these studies, and may in some cases be irrelevant or misleading (Mason 1995, p.8-11; Govindasamy and Malhotra 1996). Studies have found that the relevance of a proxy measurement of women’s empowerment may depend on the geographic region (Jejeebhoy 2000), the outcome being examined (Kishor 2000a), or the dimension(s) of empowerment that is of interest (Malhotra and Mather 1997).

In response, there have been increasing efforts at capturing the process through direct measures of decision-making, control, choice, etc. Such measures are seen as the most effective representations of the process of empowerment by many authors since they are closest to measuring agency (Hashemi et al. 1996; Mason 1998, Mason and Smith 2000; Malhotra and Mather 1997). It could be argued that the indicators with “face validity” (i.e., indicators of empowerment based on survey questions referring to very specific, concrete actions) represent power relationships and are meaningful within a particular social context.

Ideally, the best hope of capturing a process is to follow it across at least two points in time. Moreover, the gap in time required to measure the process may depend on the nature and extent of change in empowerment. Depending on the dimension of empowerment, the context, and the type of social, economic, or policy catalyst, women may become empowered in some aspects of their lives in a relatively short period of time (say 1-3 years) while other changes may evolve over decades. For policy and programmatic action, specifying the aspects of women’s empowerment that are expected to change as well as the “acceptable”

time period for change is critical in defining success or failure. As conceptual frameworks and indicators of empowerment become more sophisticated, however, there is an enormous problem with regard to the availability of adequate data across time. For example, while there is increasing agreement that measures with “face validity” are preferable to “proxy” indicators, survey data that include “face validity” measures are often one-of-a-kind attempts, and are not systematically or routinely collected across more than one point in time.

Qualitative studies of empowerment make an effort at capturing the process through in-depth interviews and case studies that follow the life changes for specific women (and men) through retrospective narratives. G. Sen (1993) has suggested that the process of empowerment is essentially qualitative in nature. Even indicators such as women’s participation in power structures like the political system are still often inadequate in telling us whether empowerment is occurring without a qualitative sense of what that representation is like or what it means (Oxaal and Baden 1997). Kabeer’s work (1997) suggests that the assessment of the process is not only qualitative, but subjective as well. According to Kabeer (1997 and 1998), the subjectivity of the process should also extend to measuring empowerment in terms of women’s own interpretation; rather than relying on what is valued by the evaluators of programs, the process of empowerment should be judged as having occurred if it is self-assessed and validated by women themselves.

Another complicating factor in assessing the empowerment process is that the behavioral and normative frontiers that define appropriate indicators for measuring empowerment are constantly evolving. The “meaning” of a particular behavior within a particular socio-cultural context (whether it signifies empowerment and whether it is influenced by empowerment) is likely to change over time, and it may change very rapidly. As a result, the relevance of specific indicators will change over time and according to the level of analysis. Data from the early 1990s suggested that in rural Bangladesh empowered women were more likely than others to use contraception (Schuler et al. 1997). Now contraceptive use is the norm—over half of all married, reproductive age women currently use it and more than three quarters have used it at one time or another. Once a behavior becomes the accepted norm there is little reason to expect that it would be influenced by an individual actor’s level of empowerment.

At the individual level, the case could be made that individual empowerment should be measured as a function of the distance between the individual’s behavior and the community norm. This would be true of indicators such as “ability to move about one’s village” or “ability to visit a health center without getting permission.” However, an indicator that is no longer a good marker of empowerment at the individual level within a community may still be a good indicator for distinguishing relative levels of empowerment between communities, as long as some variation within the larger society persists. Table 2 illustrates the shifting meanings and potential utility of one indicator in three different normative contexts at the individual and community levels.

Table 2: The usefulness of the indicator “individual woman moves about community without permission” in different normative contexts.

Level of Analysis	Normative Context		
	Women’s mobility is a longstanding norm	Claustration norm recently changed	Claustration is still the norm
Individual	Probably not useful	Probably not useful	Potentially useful
Community	Probably not useful	Potentially useful	Potentially useful

SECTION III: EVIDENCE FROM EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Overview

Empirical research on gender issues in the fields of anthropology, sociology, demography, and economics has acquired increasing levels of sophistication during the past three decades. From being limited to qualitative studies in anthropology, empirical work on women’s status began appearing in sociological and demographic studies in the 1970s. During the following decade, the shift from women’s status to a better understanding of gender inequality and concepts such as female autonomy and power moved the field forward. In the 1990s, the call for better theoretical models allowing for gender differences and the accompanying data to test them both at the macro and micro levels began to take hold within economics. While gender issues—especially as they relate to development—are not in the mainstream of any of these disciplines, important intersections exist across all four. Natural affinities have also begun to develop. Thus the critique of the unitary household model and experimentation with a range of bargaining models of power in economics has some natural affinity with conceptual frameworks emphasizing decision-making and control within demography and sociology. Researchers who have recognized and realized the value of interdisciplinary intersections in their work have perhaps made the greatest contributions in moving this field forward (Kabeer 1997 and 1998; Mason 1998; Acharya and Bennett 1981; A. Sen 1999; G. Sen 1993; Hashemi et al. 1996).

We reviewed approximately 45 empirical studies that have used quantitative and/or qualitative data to understand some aspect or variation of women’s empowerment in an effort to answer the following questions: How has existing research handled the challenges and promises of measuring empowerment and related outcomes? What patterns prevail in the current body of research and what conclusions can be drawn, in terms of policy relevance as well as for future directions for operationalizing women’s empowerment empirically? Our search encompassed all four of the disciplinary fields mentioned above, and it was extensive but by no means comprehensive. A study did not have to use the term women’s empowerment to be included; whether or not a study would contribute to a better understanding of how empowerment can be measured was a subjective assessment made by the authors. In general, we limited ourselves to studies that tested some form of “empowerment” within a reasonably well-developed conceptual framework and that

incorporated an active effort at capturing at least one of the two defining elements of empowerment described in Section I—agency and process.

It should be noted that these criteria led to the effective exclusion of most of the reports emerging from NGO programmatic efforts at “empowering” women. Many of these reports lack the conceptual and empirical rigor we felt was necessary for inclusion in the current review. With the exception of the work on microcredit, we searched in vain for programmatic assessments that were based on well-designed evaluation frameworks to test either the impact of interventions on empowering women, or the impact of empowering women on other outcomes. Given that the term “empowerment” has acquired a certain cachet in the development community, there is a tendency to use the term loosely, without embedding it in a larger conceptual framework. Thus, programmatic reports often describe mothers as empowered merely because they bring their children in for immunization, attend a health education lecture or other training, or participate in women’s NGOs or microcredit groups, without examining the circumstances or outcomes of these actions. For the most part, therefore, we ended up restricting ourselves to published works, covering studies that were interested in women’s empowerment as an outcome of interest, as well as those that assessed its importance as an intermediary factor in affecting development outcomes.

Table 3 provides a tabulation of key characteristics of the studies we reviewed. In 16 of the 45 studies, women’s empowerment itself was the outcome of interest while the other 29 studies were interested in examining the effect of certain social, economic, political, policy, or programmatic factors on development outcomes through an intermediary process of empowering women. The regional distribution of the studies was heavily biased toward Asia, and South Asia in particular. Over half the studies (25) were focused on Asia—the vast majority on India and Bangladesh—while only seven studies covered countries in Africa, and only four studies covered the LAC region. A significant proportion of the work on Asia focuses on demographic issues. The regional bias may reflect the authors’ greater familiarity with demographic research but it may also reflect greater interest or data advantages in the study of women’s empowerment in Asia.

Table 3: Distribution of studies reviewed by region, methodology, measurement across time, level of analysis, and data source.

Characteristics of Empirical Studies		“Empowerment” Is the Outcome of Interest	“Empowerment” Affects Other Outcomes of Interest
Region	Africa	1	6
	Middle East and North Africa	0	3
	Asia	11	14
	Latin America and Caribbean	2	2
	Multiple regions	2	4
	Methodology	Qualitative	2
	Quantitative	7	21
	Qualitative and quantitative	7	7
	Measurement across time	2(2)	1
Level of Analysis	Individual/household	9	16
	Community	0	1
	District or state	0	5
	Country	3	2
	Multiple levels	4	5
Data source	Primary data	11	12
	Secondary data	5	17
Number of Studies		16	29

The majority of studies (28) use quantitative methodologies. However, a significant proportion of the studies examining empowerment as the outcome of interest incorporate a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques and efforts at triangulation in their analyses (7). Most surprisingly, however, only three of the studies (Winter 1994; Kishor 1992; Tzannatos 1999) use data from more than one point in time to assess empowerment, whereas this scope of data and analysis is entirely missing from almost all of the other studies. Two qualitative studies (Kabeer 1997; Mayoux 2001) are implicitly making a comparison across time using retrospective interviews with the women in their samples. For the most part, therefore, measurement of process as one of the essential features highlighted in the conceptualization of empowerment has been rarely undertaken in the empirical work to date.

The range of development outcomes examined in research that focuses on women’s empowerment as an intermediary factor is also surprisingly limited. The heaviest concentration is on fertility/contraceptive use (12) or child health/welfare related (8) outcomes, with just a handful of studies focusing on broader issues of household well-being (5), women’s health (3), or development processes (1). Similarly, the examination of the impact of policy and program initiatives does not seem to be a high priority in empirical research. Admittedly, there is a heavy concentration of research on the impact of microcredit programs on women’s empowerment (mostly for Bangladesh), but few other initiatives are included. At

the policy level, Winter (1994) examines the impact of shifts in labor conditions and labor laws on women's empowerment in the labor market in Latin America and Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001) examine the effect of the Panchayat Raj Initiative in India.

Studies focusing on women's empowerment itself as the outcome of interest are more likely to rely on primary data sources (11 of 16) as opposed to those where empowerment is an intermediary factor in affecting other outcomes. Clearly, there has been a strong effort on the part of researchers interested in women's empowerment at collecting the appropriate data themselves. In contrast, studies interested in the intermediary role of empowerment on other development outcomes rely more heavily on secondary data sources, often large-scale sample surveys or national censuses (17 of 29). As such, the indicators used by these studies are more likely to be proxy measures that are not directly measuring empowerment. In recent years, the Demographic and Health Surveys in some countries have incorporated modules of decision-making and women's autonomy in the household, thus offering the benefits of large datasets with the specificity of analysis at the individual level. Five studies use DHS data in this way; surprisingly, none of these treat empowerment as the dependent variable. Other key data sources include the Indonesia Family Life survey (used by researchers at RAND and IFPRI), the Indian Census, the Status of Women and Fertility surveys in Asia, the Ethiopian Rural Household Survey, and the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development survey in South Africa.

How Has Empowerment Been Measured Empirically?

Household-Level Studies

Table 3 indicates that empirical analyses of women's empowerment are heavily concentrated at the individual and household level, and our review of the literature suggests that this is the level of aggregation at which the greatest strides in the measurement of empowerment have been made. Given the centrality of the household to gender relations, it is not surprising that this level of data collection and analysis has received the greatest attention. It may also be true that the feasibility of operationalizing both the agency and process components of women's empowerment in a concrete manner is more readily apparent at the household level rather than at larger levels of aggregation. And yet, our review suggests that empirical research at this level has made greater strides in operationalizing agency rather than process. With the exception of two qualitative studies which use retrospection and inference with regard to change over time, none of the household level studies operationalize empowerment by utilizing data from two points in time.

In the past two decades, researchers interested in gender inequality as it operates at the household level have made significant efforts at better capturing the agency component of empowerment by themselves designing and conducting household-level surveys that interview women, sometimes their husbands, and occasionally, other family members. Within sociology and demography, the major effort has been at measuring household decision-making processes, financial control, and social or familial constraints directly. This has been motivated by interest both in understanding empowerment itself and in outcomes

such as fertility, contraceptive use, and child health and well-being. Within economics, household surveys have become increasingly sophisticated in capturing “exogenous” measures that influence household bargaining power such as assets at marriage and non-labor income as well as intra-household allocation and control of resources and income. The major outcomes of interest among economists have been household consumption patterns and child well-being. While such surveys and analyses have advanced efforts to measure empowerment in many ways, an important limitation has been the overwhelming focus on the situation of married women (or those living in unions), where empowerment is operationalized largely in terms of relations between marital partners.

Table 4 lists the indicators used to operationalize empowerment at the individual or household level in the empirical studies we have included in our review. The two types of indicators used almost universally in the empirical literature are those measuring domestic decision-making, and those measuring either access to, or control over resources. Often, these two aspects merge since indicators on domestic decision-making tend to focus heavily on financial and resource allocation matters.

Table 4. Individual/household-level indicators of empowerment used in empirical studies.

<p><i>Most-Frequently-Used Indicators</i></p> <p>Domestic decision-making Finances, resource allocation, spending, expenditures Social and domestic matters (e.g., cooking) Child-related issues (e.g., well-being, schooling, health)</p> <p>Access to or control over resources Access to, control of cash, household income, assets, unearned income, welfare receipts, household budget, participation in paid employment</p> <p>Mobility/freedom of movement</p> <p><i>Less-Frequently-Used Indicators</i></p> <p>Economic contribution to household</p> <p>Time use/division of domestic labor</p> <p>Freedom from violence</p> <p>Management/knowledge Farm management Accounting knowledge Managerial control of loan</p> <p>Public space Political participation (e.g., public protests, political campaigning) Confidence in community actions Development of social and economic collective</p> <p>Marriage/kin/social support Traditional support networks Social status of family of origin Assets brought to marriage Control over choosing a spouse</p> <p>Couple interaction Couple communication Negotiation and discussion of sex</p> <p>Appreciation in household</p>

Sense of self worth

The emphasis on such measures in the empirical literature corresponds well with the emphasis on resources and agency in the conceptual literature, as well as with the frequent equation of empowerment with choice, control, and power. Certainly, there is an intuitive appeal to decision-making and control as signifying important aspects of agency. At the same time, since data collection at a single point in time does not effectively allow for direct measurement of long-term strategic choices, a *de facto* operating assumption (albeit not always directly stated) in most household level studies is that a person's ability to make strategic life choices is linked with her access to, and control over, economic and other resources and her ability to make smaller, quotidian decisions.

In our basic definition of empowerment drawn from Kabeer (2001), "strategic life choices" would refer to decisions that influence a person's life trajectory and subsequent ability to exercise autonomy and make choices. Examples include decisions related to marriage, education, employment, and childbearing. One argument is that as such strategic choices are likely to take place relatively infrequently in a person's life, it is often difficult to link them with policy and program interventions unless the time frame of the research is very long. Given the measurement constraints imposed by the infrequency of "strategic life choices" in an individual's life, it almost becomes necessary to consider "small" actions and choices if measuring empowerment in the short term. Indeed, given their scope, most household-level studies that have included indicators of women's empowerment have not focused on "strategic life choices" but, rather, on what might be termed "empowerment in small things."

There is some published evidence from empirical studies that the assumption that the ability to make strategic life choices is linked with the ability to make smaller decisions is valid, but results from other studies suggest that this is not always the case. It is not easy to judge from the existing body of research to what extent the negative results are due to inadequate study designs and imprecise measurement, due to the multidimensional or contextual nature of empowerment, or simply the lack of implementing a research design for measurement across time. For example, it is often not easy for researchers to know whether they have included all the relevant small or large decisions that are likely to matter for women in specific circumstances—the relevance of decisions is often specific to the community context, as well as to ethnic and socio-economic status. Moreover, it is difficult to assign relative weights to the importance of decisions that are included in an analysis: decision-making power over cooking is unlikely to be equivalent to decision-making power over children's schooling or health, or marriage, but empirical studies often rely on additive indices of domestic decision-making.

Similarly, the allocation and control of resources can be murkier than they appear at first sight. For example, Kabeer (2001) points out a lack of conceptual rigor in many quantitative studies in their operational definitions of access to and control over resources, both of which are often measured based on questions about women's involvement in decisions related to various household expenditures and management of money. The extent to which such decision-making reflects merely women's implementation of the tasks relegated to them by convention remains a question. On the other hand, studies also show that the fact that a woman brings

resources into the home or marriage may strengthen her position in the household, even if she exercises little control over the resource. For example, a woman's assets at marriage or participation in a microcredit program may help establish her bargaining position in the conjugal relationship even if the actual resource utilization is in the hands of her husband (Hashemi et al. 1996).

Freedom of movement is another common indicator in empirical research at the individual/household level, especially in studies on South Asia where women's presence in the public sphere is often severely constrained. In some circumstances, freedom of movement could be seen as an empowerment resource, an enabling factor for women's agency in other areas of life. On the other hand, taking the initiative to work outside the home or bring a sick child to a health center could be seen as a form of agency in a setting where female claustration is the norm. Few studies have made qualitative efforts to tease out precisely how increased freedom of movement either facilitates or reflects the process of empowerment.

At the individual and household levels, other important indicators of empowerment have been used, but much less frequently in the empirical literature we reviewed. Within the domestic domain, for example, the *relative* value of a woman's economic contribution is used much less often than the simple fact that she brings in an income or has control over resources. Kabeer (1997) discusses the shifts in women's importance in the family because of the weight of their earnings in her qualitative study of factory workers in Bangladesh. Similarly, despite the extensive literature on the importance of time use and the domestic division of labor for defining women's life options and domestic power in developed country settings, these indicators are rarely incorporated in research on empowerment for developing country settings. Acharya and Bennett (1983) demonstrate a relationship between time spent in market versus non-market activities and women's decision-making power. In addition, using the Indonesia Family Life Survey, Frankenberg and Thomas (2001) are able to incorporate time use in their recent analysis of domestic decision-making and power, mainly due to the unusually rich data available through this source.

Inclusion of indicators on couple communication has been limited largely to studies on contraceptive use, while efforts at measuring sexual negotiation and communication have only begun to gain legitimacy with emerging research on HIV/AIDS. Wolff et al.'s (2000) analysis of condom use in Uganda considers women's ability to negotiate and discuss sexual relations. In the same vein, it is only recently that studies on empowerment have started to include measures on physical violence or threat, even though it is clear that physical or sexual intimidation is of critical importance defining one's ability to make strategic life choices. Rao (1998) finds wife beating to be a key determinant of children's caloric intake in India. Qualitative studies (Kabeer 1997 and 1998) often find physical violence and threats of abandonment to be central elements in processes which shape women's disempowerment, but Schuler et al.'s (1996) work in Bangladesh and Jejeebhoy's (2000) study of women's autonomy in India represent the limited quantitative efforts at incorporating this element within a comprehensive conceptual framework of empowerment.

Similarly, there are valiant, but only sporadic efforts in the literature at capturing empowerment indicators for social capital and support, or women's engagement in public

spaces and processes (economic, social, and political), again emerging more from qualitative rather than quantitative studies (Mayoux 2001). Although several household surveys measure contextual indicators at the community level, few consider the possibility of measuring individual women's engagement in community or political processes. Hashemi et al. (1996) include women's political and legal awareness and political participation, while Kabeer (1998) includes confidence in community interactions in their separate analyses of microcredit and women's empowerment in Bangladesh. Although not thoroughly reviewed here, qualitative studies have delved into the emotional and psychological spheres by asking women about their sense of self worth or value to others (Kabeer 1997 and 1998).

Aggregate-Level Studies

Empirical measurement of women's empowerment at the aggregate level has not progressed as substantially as has household- or individual-level measurement. Conceptual frameworks of how women's empowerment should be operationalized at the macro level are less well-developed, and the indicators utilized in studies are less sophisticated, with continued reliance on proxy measures. Table 5 lists the indicators used to measure women's empowerment by empirical studies at the aggregate level. Clearly, capturing either process or agency becomes much more difficult at higher levels of aggregation; most of the indicators are one step removed and tend to measure the enabling factors or conditions for empowerment in terms of labor force participation, labor laws, literacy, education, characteristics of marriage and kinship, and political representation by women. This inherent difficulty with measuring women's empowerment at the aggregate-level analysis is compounded by the lack of consistent and adequate data on a comprehensive set of even proxy measures or enabling factors for most developing countries.

Table 5. Aggregate level indicators of empowerment used in empirical studies.

Labor Market
Female labor force participation (or female share, or female/male ratios)
Occupational sex segregation
Gender wage differentials
Child care options
Labor laws
Percentage of wives/women in modern work
Ratio of female/male administrators and managers
Ratio of female/male professional and technical workers
Women's share of earned income
Education
Female literacy (or female share, female/male ratio)
Female enrollment in secondary school
Maternal education
Marriage/Kinship system
Singulate mean age at marriage
Mean spousal age difference
Proportion unmarried females aged 15-19
Area of rice cultivation
Relative rates of female to male migration
Geographic region
Social Norms and Practices
Wives'/women's physical mobility
Health/Survival
Relative child survival/Sex ratios of mortality
Political and Legal
Ratio of seats in parliament held by women
Women's legal rights
Questions, complains, requests from women at village council

In effect, the limited number of studies we were able to select in this category is in itself an indication of the relative lack of conceptual attention given to measuring women's empowerment in empirical work at the aggregate level. In sifting through the large number of studies that have related the above (and similar) indicators to various development outcomes, we found only a handful that satisfied our criteria of either addressing agency or process directly, or having some semblance of a conceptual framework with regard to women's

empowerment. For a substantial portion of this literature, the equation of specific indicators—either individually, in some combination, or through construction of indices—with gender inequality, and occasionally empowerment, is often based on arbitrary choices rather than on conceptual frameworks. The indicators most frequently used in this manner are women’s education, employment, and legal rights. For example, in their analysis of gender inequality and economic growth, Dollar and Gatti (1999) decide that women’s empowerment is one of four relevant dimensions of gender inequality, and measure it using the percentage of women in parliament and the year when women earned the right to vote, without discussing why their four specific choices should comprise gender inequality, why the specific indicators used for each are the appropriate choices for those dimensions, or why parliamentary representation and the year the right to vote was gained are adequate measures of women’s empowerment. Similarly, Boone (1996) uses data on rights to construct an index of “gender oppression,” in order to measure women’s autonomy, without justifying why legal rights are adequate for measuring either of these concepts.

Our review suggests that single indicators or even composite indices such as the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) are inadequate to the task of measuring women’s empowerment at the aggregate level (Bardhan and Klasen 1999; Oxaal and Baden 1997). Elson (1999) and others have made an eloquent case for why aggregate-level indicators such as women’s participation in paid work do not necessarily capture empowerment. In large part, this is because it is not clear that women are always able to exercise agency as a result of employment. Similarly, a strong case can be made with regard to the inadequacy of measures on legal or political rights in reflecting women’s actual ability to exercise rights. For example, Meinzen-Dick et al. (1997) and Rocheleau and Edmunds (1997) argue that titling, group political organization for equitable access and control of land, and the actual distribution of use and ownership at the local level are critical factors in determining if land rights for women are realizable or not. Similarly, Kabeer (2001) stresses the failure of many empirical studies in taking full account of the dynamic between *de jure* rights to land and other resources, and *de facto* rights. She cites examples showing that cultural taboos often make women reluctant to claim their legal inheritance rights. Empirical work at documenting *de facto* rights would certainly involve attention to intermediary levels of aggregation—at the community level. Similarly, assessment of women’s empowerment in the labor market would require analyses at the industry or sectoral levels.

As indicators of control and decision-making are difficult if not impossible to measure at the macro level, we suggest that the task of inference from macro data would be considerably facilitated by evaluating a strong *cluster* of aggregate-level indicators on a *specific dimension* of empowerment across at least two points in time. The studies by Tzannatos (1999) and Winter (1994) provide important examples of this approach. In each case, the authors are interested in one specific dimension of empowerment: shifts in women’s labor market position over time. Tzannatos focuses on a range of countries across the world, while Winter’s work is limited to a group of countries in Latin America. Instead of a single indicator or an index, both authors use a cluster of labor market indicators—including female labor force participation, gender wage differentials, occupational sex segregation, etc—to make their assessment. As Winter’s study is limited to a smaller number of countries, she is able to use a broader set of indicators, covering labor laws and child care options, thus giving

greater weight to her conclusion that women's position in the labor market in these countries has improved.

This approach can be considered a form of triangulation: rather than relying on a single indicator or index to represent a specific dimension, multiple indicators within the same dimension provide opportunity for confirmation as well as contradiction. Based on the cumulative evidence, one could infer whether or not women's ability to make strategic choices within this specific dimension has increased over time, and the reliability of the inference would depend on the number and adequacy of the indicators chosen. As mentioned before, a major difficulty in implementing this approach is the lack of adequate gender-disaggregated data for developing countries on most indicators that are likely to be relevant in formulating a cluster.

Intermediate-Level Studies

Our review makes it clear that the lack of studies addressing levels of aggregation intermediate between the individual/household and the district/state/nation is one of the most significant gaps in efforts at empirically measuring women's empowerment. Community, institutional, and normative factors are considered in studies that take a multilevel approach (Jejeebhoy 2000; Kabeer 1998; Kritz 2000; Mason 1998), but in general how women in specific communities may be empowered through shifts in norms, marriage systems, political processes, etc. is not assessed in the literature. Studies on collective action are one area of potential contribution to the analysis of women's empowerment at the local or community level. Our review of the literature on collective action and women's empowerment, however, mostly identified work that is either descriptive or prescriptive in nature. Thus, although there are excellent examples of social movements and collective action empowering women, especially in South Asia—e.g., the anti-liquor movement, SEWA, Sonagachi—most studies document rather than analyze the processes involved (Carr et al. 1996; Wedeen 1996; Bhatt 1989).

We have also noted that efforts at conducting and documenting scientifically sound evaluations of programmatic and policy interventions are lacking in the literature relevant to women's empowerment. It is precisely at the community, institutional, and normative levels that such interventions tend to play out, and if women's empowerment is to be a goal of such initiatives, then some potential measurement schemes need to be developed for capturing the process at this level. The one study in our review that points to some direction in this area is the (rough) assessment of the initiative to increase female representation in village panchayats in India by Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001). These authors consider a different range of questions than the ones addressed by the studies referred to thus far; they examine women's participation in village councils, their engagement in the political process, and their preferences for development investment.

How Conclusive Is the Evidence?

Given the strengths and limitations of indicators used to measure empowerment, what can we say about the existing evidence regarding the factors that empower women, and whether or not the empowerment of women results in positive development outcomes? As we discuss below, the vast majority of such studies do not measure empowerment effectively enough for this question to be answered adequately at this stage. Most studies capture some possible slice of empowerment rather than empowerment itself. Within this limited range, the record based on the empirical literature we reviewed seems to be heavily weighted toward positive relationships. Most studies conclude that enabling factors such as education, employment, positive marriage or kinship conditions, or programmatic interventions such as microcredit lead to women having more choice, options, control, or power over their life conditions. Similarly, studies examining the intermediary role of empowerment also conclude that women's control of assets, income, household decision-making, etc. leads to better outcomes for their families, improved child well-being, and reduced fertility rates.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the results are not unequivocally positive, and that in fact, considerable subjective judgment is involved in the types of analyses conducted, and the results that are highlighted. For example, if we consider the one programmatic intervention that is most studied in the literature, microcredit, we find some conflicting results depending on the authors' orientation and emphasis. Hashemi et al. (1996) and Kabeer (1998) conclude that microcredit participation is empowering for women in Bangladesh while Goetz and Gupta (1996) and Ackerly (1995) conclude that it is not. Kabeer (1998) argues that the negative results for the latter authors reflect a narrow operationalization of empowerment. It would also be correct to say that the discrepancy reflects differential expectations and assessments. Hashemi et al. and Kabeer acknowledge that larger patriarchal structures were not altered by microcredit, but that women had incrementally more power and control over their lives within the familial domain. Goetz and Gupta, and Ackerly, on the other hand, were hoping for shifts in women's position within the market, an agenda perhaps too ambitious for the scope of single-focus interventions such as microcredit programs.

The empirical research also indicates contextual differences in the impact of microcredit programs. For example, Khandker (1998) and Pitt and Khandker (1998) find a very substantial impact on household expenditure of women rather than men borrowing in Bangladesh. Schuler et al. (1994 and 1997) also find that it leads to increased contraceptive use within the Bangladeshi setting. However, Schuler and her colleagues did not find positive results regarding the impact of participation in microcredit programs on contraceptive behavior in the Indian and Bolivian settings. Similarly, Mayoux (2001) finds that in Cameroon, the potential for channeling credit through traditional social networks limits benefits to women.

The evidence with regard to child health and well-being is perhaps even more equivocal. Several studies argue that the impact of women's empowerment on child health and well-being is generally positive. For example, Basu and Basu (1991) and Kishor (1993) base this conclusion on findings using Indian census data showing that women's labor force participation is negatively associated with female-to-male child mortality ratios. At the

household level, Rao (1998) concludes that children's caloric consumption is favored by women's education, income, and freedom from domestic violence. At the same time, Kishor's (1992) analysis of the Indian census across time (1961 to 1981) suggests that development may actually allow parents—including women—better opportunities for gender discrimination by practicing son preference. That factors that may empower women are possibly emphasizing the disadvantage to their daughters is also apparent in two household-level studies in Cote d'Ivoire (Haddad and Hoddinott 1994) and Indonesia (Thomas et al. 1997). Both these studies find that women's relative advantage in assets or income share leads to health benefits for sons, but not necessarily daughters.

SECTION IV: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

As a review of existing theoretical and empirical literature, this paper is a first step toward identifying the most promising methodological approaches to measuring and analyzing women's empowerment. Our review indicates that although additional iterations of this process are clearly necessary in order to develop an approach that is viable for the World Bank and other multilateral organizations, the existing literature provides important guidance and direction in moving this task forward. While clearly, women's empowerment is a complex concept that poses many challenges in conceptualization and measurement, these challenges are probably no greater than is the case for other complex development concepts such as poverty reduction or social inclusion. As has been the case with these other concepts, sustained efforts at analysis and refinement are necessary for moving the measurement agenda forward.

Our review revealed a number of important strengths in the existing work on women's empowerment that provides the foundation for further progress on measurement. The most important of these is the fact that despite the confusion in rhetoric and terminology, there is greater consensus in the theoretical literature on what empowerment means and how it should be conceptualized, and even operationalized, than we had expected. We find that there is substantial agreement on "process" and "agency" as being essential to women's empowerment, and in distinguishing it from related terms such as gender equality. Moreover, considerable groundwork has already been done in developing frameworks that specify the dimensions of empowerment, its contextual nature, and the various levels at which it could be measured. Although no existing framework stands out above others as the one to be adopted, taken as a whole, the existing frameworks provide the essential raw materials for developing a workable roadmap for measuring women's empowerment.

Empirically as well, a number of studies from a range of disciplines have attempted to measure various aspects of women's empowerment, either as the outcome of interest, or as the intermediary factor affecting other development outcomes. Efforts at data collection and analysis, especially at the household and individual level, have become more common and sophisticated in recent years, and although they continue to have limitations, they provide important guidance for future efforts at measuring women's empowerment.

At the same time, important challenges remain. It is apparent that most of the empirical studies we reviewed utilize indicators and analyses of empowerment that do not effectively operationalize the consensus-based definition and conceptualization of empowerment that we outline in the first half of this paper. The vast majority of empirical studies are not measuring the process element of empowerment. Additionally, macro-level studies are especially weak on measuring agency and often do not employ a relevant conceptual framework. Household-level studies have made significant progress in conceptualizing broader, context-specific frameworks and in specifying indicators that can be said to capture aspects of agency, but considerably more work is required in this area. The lack of empirical research at “meso” levels presents an important gap, as does the relative lack of rigorous research on policy and programmatic efforts.

Data limitations have also presented an important constraint in efforts to measure women’s empowerment. Macro-level studies are especially limited in the extent to which they can operationalize innovative approaches to this task by the lack of gender-disaggregated data from developing countries on a vast majority of relevant indicators. Our review of the empirical literature suggests that in many cases researchers recognize the data constraints, but have had to adapt their studies to the limitations. Others have collected primary data, but often in isolation from each other, and never through longitudinal or panel studies.

Recommendations for Next Steps

We propose the following next steps for moving forward the agenda on measuring women’s empowerment:

1. Development of a framework of domains or dimensions that can be applied across settings would be the natural next step for building on the strengths of the existing literature on the conceptualization of empowerment. Procedures for determining indicators for each domain, at different levels of aggregation and across contexts, should also be developed. This effort would move the measurement of women’s empowerment agenda forward considerably by allowing for greater specification of exactly what aspect of empowerment—i.e., which dimension—is of interest, and realistic specifications of the type of change that can be expected over a specific period of time, and given specific interventions. It would also move forward efforts to develop context-specific measures that more closely resemble what they are meant to measure and reduce the reliance on proxy measures.
2. Better, more coordinated efforts at data collection are needed. For example, the process component of women’s empowerment cannot be effectively captured in any measurement scheme without the availability of data across time. Attention to process also requires a discussion of the appropriate time periods for data collection of various types of indicators. At the aggregate level, a broader range of more sophisticated, gender- disaggregated data is needed with regard to the labor force, market conditions, legal and political rights, political and social processes. At the household level, data need to be more frequently

collected for important but relatively under-utilized indicators such as time use or violence against women.

3. Greater attention to measuring women's empowerment at meso levels is required along with efforts at documenting the impact of program and policy interventions. For programmatic and policy evaluation, existing models of monitoring and evaluation that are effective need to be tapped, and their adequacy for women's empowerment as an outcome or intermediary process should be assessed. At a minimum, quasi-experimental evaluation designs and the collection of baseline and endline data must be considered in implementing programs aimed at empowering women. Measurement of institutional and normative change in communities requires new and innovative approaches. One approach to consider is the business school model of case studies. Documentation through narratives which are then analyzed using qualitative techniques would be another option. Exploration of the work on collective action may also provide further guidance. This is clearly an area where a review of lessons learned from related efforts and cross-disciplinary approaches would be helpful.
4. Greater interdisciplinary engagement is necessary to develop indicators and approaches that capture the key elements of women's empowerment, have scientific merit, and have acceptability among important stakeholders. Although at this stage we have drawn only from literature that has been at the core of the discourse on women's empowerment, it is clear that continued efforts at moving this work forward would benefit from drawing on a wide range of disciplines. Moreover, based on what we reviewed from sociology, demography, economics, and anthropology, it is clear that there is overlap but not much interaction across disciplines. Further interdisciplinary engagement would greatly facilitate the task of translating the current consensus on conceptualization to the actual measurement of women's empowerment.

Appendix A: Dimensions of Empowerment Proposed by Selected Authors

CIDA 1996	Legal empowerment Political empowerment Economic empowerment Social empowerment
Jejeebhoy 1995	Knowledge autonomy Decision-making autonomy Physical autonomy Emotional autonomy Economic and social autonomy and self-reliance
Kishor 2000a	Financial autonomy Participation in the modern sector Lifetime exposure to employment Sharing of roles and decision-making Family structure amenable to empowerment Equality in marriage (lack of) Devaluation of women Women's emancipation Marital advantage Traditional marriage
Schuler and Hashemi 1993	Mobility and visibility
Hashemi et al. 1996	Economic security
Schuler et al. 1996	Status and decision-making power within the household
Schuler et al. 1997	Ability to interact effectively in the public sphere Participation in nonfamily groups
Stromquist 1995	Cognitive Psychological Economic Political
A. Sen 1999	Absence of gender inequality in: Mortality rates Natality rates Access to basic facilities such as schooling Access to professional training and higher education Employment Property ownership Household work and decision-making

Appendix B: Empirical Studies Where Empowerment Is the Outcome of Interest

Study and Location	Sample and Design	Independent and Intermediary Variables	Indicators of Empowerment (as dependent variable(s))	Findings
Acharya and Bennett 1983 Nepal	Surveyed and interviewed 478 women and 443 men in 7 villages	Market labor versus unpaid family labor	Women's role in farm management, domestic, and resource allocation decisions	Bringing women into the market economy positively affects their influence in resource allocation and domestic decision-making.
Ackerly 1995 Bangladesh	Analyzed data on 826 loans to 613 women in 3 locations	Loan characteristics and women's involvement in market activities funded by loans	Women's accounting knowledge: ability to provide information on input costs, product yield, and profitability of the loan-funded activity	Women gain knowledge and empowerment through market access, but it rarely occurs.
Frankenberg and Thomas 2001 Indonesia	Analyzed data on 5,168 couples from the decision-making module in the 1997-8 Indonesia Family Life Survey, including data from 4 focus groups	Relative status of husbands and wives at marriage, e.g., education, age, and social status of family of origin	Women's role in household decision-making: control over cash, spending, and time use	Status influences financial arrangements and decision making power.
Goetz and Gupta 1996 Bangladesh	Interviewed 253 women and 22 men loanees in 5 regions	Loan characteristics, e.g., size of loan and investment activity	Women's versus men's managerial control of loan: reported control of productive process, marketing, and inputs	Men often control loans given to women. Thus, microcredit programs are not necessarily empowering women.
Grasmuck and Espinal 2000 Dominican Republic	Surveyed 126 men and 75 women micro-entrepreneurs and conducted 20 in-depth interviews in Santiago	Women's versus men's financial contribution to household	Women's role in household expenditure decision-making	Both gender ideology and reliance of households on individuals' income are important to autonomy.

Study and Location	Sample and Design	Independent and Intermediary Variables	Indicators of Empowerment (as dependent variable(s))	Findings
Hashemi et al. 1996 Bangladesh	Surveyed 1,248 women following ethnographic research in 6 villages	Microcredit participation and women's contribution to household	Empowerment in household and community spheres: mobility (e.g., number of places woman goes alone); economic security (e.g., women's investments); decision making power (e.g., ability to make large purchases and history of domestic violence); political and legal awareness (e.g., knowledge of name of gov't official); participation in public protests and political campaigning	Microcredit empowers women (in all but two empowerment domains) by giving them greater economic value to their families.
Jejeebhoy 2000 India	Surveyed 1,842 women in two districts in each of two states and conducted focus groups	Women's and household characteristics, e.g., district, religion, education, participation in waged work, dowry size, marriage endogamy, spousal age difference, household economic status	Role in economic decision making (e.g., having major say in purchase of jewelry); role in child-related decision making (e.g., having major say in what to do if child falls ill); mobility; freedom from threat (e.g., whether woman fears man); control of resource (e.g., whether woman has savings)	Some dimensions of autonomy are more closely related than others. Proxies are good estimates of autonomy for some indicators in some regions only.
Kabeer 1997 Bangladesh	Interviewed 60 women and 30 men garment factory workers in Dhaka	Factory wage work and women's contributions to the household	Women's perceived status in the household (e.g., appreciation, domestic violence, input in decision-making)	Women reported greater status in the household as a result of factory work, but men reported that women factory workers are low status.

Study and Location	Sample and Design	Independent and Intermediary Variables	Indicators of Empowerment (as dependent variable(s))	Findings
Kabeer 1998 Bangladesh	Surveyed 696 women loanees and conducted in-depth interviews with 50 women and 20 men	Women's involvement in market activities funded by loan	Perceived changes in women's self-worth, agency, contribution to the household, and confidence in community interactions	Microcredit has decreased the trade-offs that women have to make between dimensions of their well-being.
Malhotra and Mather 1997 Sri Lanka	Surveyed 577 women in Kalutara district and conducted a series of focus groups	Women's and husband's characteristics, e.g., education, participation in waged work, life course stage, family structure	Women's role in household decision making: control over money matters and other important household matters	Work for pay and education increase decision-making input in financial, but not social and organization matters in the household.
Mason 1998 Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines	Surveyed probability samples of women in 26 clusters of villages or urban neighborhoods	Social context in terms of gender and family systems, and women's and household characteristics, e.g., land assets, participation in waged work, wife's rank relative to husband	Women's role in household expenditure decision-making	Social context has indirect and direct effects on women's economic power.
Mayoux 2001 Cameroon	Conducted 13 focus groups and in-depth interviews with women in 4 provinces	Microcredit participation and social capital, i.e. kinship, neighborhood, and market networks	Women's individual income, control over income, and development of collective social and economic activities	Using existing forms of social capital to channel microcredit limits benefits to women, especially the poorest women.
Schuler et al. 1996 Bangladesh	Surveyed 1,248 women following ethnographic research in 6 villages.	Microcredit participation	Incidences of domestic violence	Domestic violence is less common in communities where microcredit for women is available.

Study and Location	Sample and Design	Independent and Intermediary Variables	Indicators of Empowerment (as dependent variable(s))	Findings
Tzannatos 1999 Multiple countries and regions	Analyzed International Labor Organization data from 1950s to 1990s for available countries—most comparisons for the 1980s	Economic growth—change over time	Women’s labor market position: labor force participation rates, occupational sex segregation, and gender wage differentials	Evaluating the most representative labor market indicators in developing countries during the last few decades shows that there has been a rapid improvement in women’s labor market position.
UNDP Human Development Report 1995 and 1998 Worldwide	Synthesized national-level data from a variety of sources		Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM): ratio of seats in parliament held by women; ratio of female administrators and managers; ratio of female professionals and technical workers; women's share of earned income	The GEM reflects economic and political decision making—that is, women’s ability to take advantage of capabilities.
Winter 1994 Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Venezuela	Analyzed employment and earnings data from a variety of national household surveys in the 1980s	Employers’ policy interventions in women’s formal sector work, e.g., hiring and wage behavior	Women's labor market position: labor force participation rates, occupational sex segregation, gender wage differentials, child care accessibility, and labor laws	Overall, women's labor market position has improved, although there are still significant personal costs to women. Protective laws, maternity protection laws, and laws on child care may raise the cost of hiring women. Equal pay provisions are often ineffective and discrimination explains much of the gender wage gap.

Appendix C: Empirical Studies where “Empowerment” Affects Other Outcomes of Interest

Study and Location	Sample and Design	Indicators of Empowerment (as independent or intermediary variable(s))	Dependent Variable(s)	Findings
FERTILITY AND CONTRACEPTIVE USE				
Abadian 1996 54 countries	Analyzed data from a variety of UN and World Bank surveys	Women’s relative autonomy in household (e.g., singulate mean age at marriage, mean spousal age difference, and female enrollment in secondary school)	Total fertility rate	Autonomy has a negative impact on fertility.
Dyson and Moore 1983 India	Analyzed Indian census data from 1971 and secondary sources of ethnographic study	Women’s social and economic autonomy (e.g., female labor force participation, percentage of women practicing purdah, female literacy, percentage of births medically attended, index of son preference)	Fertility	Kinship patterns have a strong influence on women’s autonomy and fertility levels.
Gage 1995 Togo	Analyzed data on 3,360 women from the 1988 Togo Demographic Health Survey	Women’s individual socioeconomic status and autonomy (e.g., control over choice of spouse, and participation in waged work)	Modern contraception use	Women’s control over choice of spouse and access to cash (women’s autonomy) increases contraceptive use.

Study and Location	Sample and Design	Indicators of Empowerment (as independent or intermediary variable(s))	Dependent Variable(s)	Findings
Govindasamy and Malhotra 1996 Egypt	Analyzed data on 7,857 women from the 1988 Egypt Demographic Health Survey	Freedom of movement, weight of wives' opinion in household, and preference for who should control household budget	Current contraceptive use and preference for joint versus independent fertility decision making	Freedom of mobility and influence in nonreproductive dimensions result in higher contraceptive use. Women who prefer joint decision-making are not less likely to use contraceptives. The use of education and employment as proxies for autonomy should be questioned.
Jejeebhoy 1995 Worldwide	Reviewed multiple studies on the relationships between education and fertility.	Education, kinship structures, and women's autonomy	Fertility	Kinship structures affect educational expansion. Education decreases fertility by promoting women's autonomy.
Kishor 2000a Egypt	Analyzed data on 7,123 women from the 1995-6 Egypt Demographic Health Survey	Women's role in household decision making (about 7 topics); freedom of movement (e.g., number of places a woman goes alone or with children); education; participation in waged work	Contraceptive use	Decision-making and freedom of movement have different effects on unmet need. Empowerment needs to be measured directly and in conjunction with proxies.
Kritz et al. 2000 Nigeria	Analyzed data on 4,870 women from a 1991 survey of women's status and fertility in 4 provinces in each of 5 states	Gender context of community (e.g., index of mean spousal age difference; percentage of wives in modern work; wives' physical mobility); women's role in household decision-making; individual socioeconomic status	Desire for children and contraceptive use	Gender equity by province positively affects reproductive behavior, and wife's SES has strongest impact in contexts of low gender equity.

Study and Location	Sample and Design	Indicators of Empowerment (as independent or intermediary variable(s))	Dependent Variable(s)	Findings
Malhotra et al. 1995 India	Analyzed data on populations of 358 districts from the 1981 Indian census	Three dimensions of patriarchy: active discrimination towards women (e.g., sex ratio of mortality); marriage system (e.g., female migration); economic value of women (e.g., area of rice cultivation)	Total fertility rate	Each dimension of patriarchy has a relationship to fertility, but together they do not completely explain fertility levels.
Mason and Smith 2000 Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines	Surveyed probability samples of women and conjugal couples in 26 clusters of villages or urban neighborhoods	Women's empowerment in economic and reproductive decision making (e.g., who decides the number of children to have); mobility; freedom from threat (e.g., whether wife is beaten); couple communication (e.g., whether couple has discussed family planning)	Desire for children and contraceptive use	Gender stratification does not influence spouses' agreement about number of children to have but does influence use of contraception, so that in highly gender stratified communities, husbands' preferences have a greater effect than wives'.
Schuler and Hashemi 1994 Schuler et al. 1997 Bangladesh	Surveyed 1,248 women following ethnographic research in 6 villages	Empowerment in household and community spheres: mobility (e.g., number of places woman goes alone); economic security (e.g., investments); decision making power (e.g., ability to make large purchases and history of domestic violence); political and legal awareness (e.g., knowledge of name of gov't official); participation in public protests and political campaigning	Contraceptive use	Microcredit empowers women. Women who are empowered are more likely to use contraceptives. Credit participation and empowerment have independent effects on contraceptive use.

Study and Location	Sample and Design	Indicators of Empowerment (as independent or intermediary variable(s))	Dependent Variable(s)	Findings
Schuler et al. 1995a Bolivia	Surveyed 363 women vendors and producers who received microcredit and 295 who did not, and conducted in-depth interviews with 30 women and 8 men on contraception	Empowerment in household and community spheres: e.g., whether woman holds office in trade association, receives household help from husband, tolerates violence, and participates in traditional support networks)	Contraceptive and modern health services use	Microcredit has no effect on empowerment (except leadership in trade associations), decision making, contraception or modern health services use, perhaps because these are not the right empowerment indicators for Bolivia.
Schuler et al. 1995b India	Analyzed 50 life histories of self-employed women in Ahmedabad, including 32 members of SEWA, a women's NGO	Empowerment in household and community spheres (same as for Schuler and Hashemi 1994, above, except that indicators of mobility were replaced with indicators of sense of self and vision of future, e.g., saving for the future, and self-efficacy)	Contraceptive use	SEWA is empowering women, but it does not translate into greater contraceptive use

CHILD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Basu and Basu 1991 India	Analyzed state-level data from the Indian Census on employment and child survival from 1981 along with qualitative data from 1988	Women's labor force participation	Child mortality and sex ratio in child mortality	Women's employment leads to decrease in female child mortality compared to male child mortality.
Desai and Alva 1998 22 developing countries	Analyzed data on women with children under 5 years old from 22 Demographic Health Surveys	Education	Infant mortality, height for age, and child immunization status	Child health does improve with maternal education, but mostly because education is a proxy for SES, not because it empowers women.

Study and Location	Sample and Design	Indicators of Empowerment (as independent or intermediary variable(s))	Dependent Variable(s)	Findings
Haddad and Hoddinott 1994 Cote d'Ivoire		Wives' versus husbands' share of cash income	Children's height for age and weight for height	Increasing wives' income share leads to better height for weight outcomes for sons but not daughters.
Kishor 1992 India	Analyzed data on 309 districts from the Indian census of 1961 and 1981	Women's economic worth (e.g., labor force participation); kinship structure (e.g., relative female migration); social stratification (e.g., percentage of landless farm workers)	Relative child survival, measured by the difference between log of 1981 and log of 1961 juvenile sex ratios	Increases in development are associated with decreases in relative female survival, perhaps by enabling parents to exercise preferences for sons. Greater female labor force participation mitigates the impact of exogamy on female survival.
Kishor 1993 India	Analyzed data on 352 districts from the Indian census of 1981	Women's economic worth (e.g., labor force participation); kinship structure (e.g., relative female migration); social stratification (e.g., percentage of landless farm workers)	Gender differences in child mortality	Kinship structure (culture) and female labor force participation (economy) are both important to gender differentials in early childhood mortality.
Kishor 2000b Egypt	Analyzed data on 3,783 women who had a birth in the last 5 years from the 1995-6 Egypt Demographic Health Survey	32 indicators of behavioral and attitudinal factors grouped into 10 dimensions of empowerment	Infant mortality and child immunization status	Important to measure all the components of empowerment, as different dimensions are relevant to different development indices.

Study and Location	Sample and Design	Indicators of Empowerment (as independent or intermediary variable(s))	Dependent Variable(s)	Findings
Rao 1998 India	Surveyed all 177 women potters and 130 of their husbands in three villages, and interviewed 70 women and 30 men	Women's characteristics (e.g., education, number of living children, individual income) and household characteristics (e.g., incidences of wife-beating, and net dowry)	Children's caloric consumption	Wife-beating negatively affects children's caloric intake. Wife's income, education, and greater number of male children reduce wife-beating.
Thomas, Contreras, and Frankenberg 1997 Indonesia	Analyzed data on 5,168 couples from the decision-making module in the 1997-8 Indonesia Family Life Survey, including data from 4 focus groups	Assets brought into marriage by husbands and wives	Gender differentiation in child illnesses	Sons of women with higher assets at marriage are less likely than their sisters to experience respiratory disorders

HOUSEHOLD CONSUMPTION AND WELL-BEING

Hoddinott and Haddad 1995 Cote d'Ivoire		Wives' versus husband's share and control of cash income	Household consumption	Wives' share of cash income increases budget share spent of food and decreases budget share spent on clothing, meals eaten out, alcohol and cigarettes.
Pitt and Khandker 1998 Khandker 1998 Bangladesh	Surveyed 1,528 households in 87 villages	Amount of microcredit to women and men and women's control of resources	Household consumption	Credit to women but not men increases non-land assets held by women, male and female labor supply and boys' and girls' schooling. The impact of female borrowing on total per capita expenditure is twice as large as the impact

of male borrowing.

Study and Location	Sample and Design	Indicators of Empowerment (as independent or intermediary variable(s))	Dependent Variable(s)	Findings
Quisumbing and de la Briere 2000 Bangladesh	Surveyed 826 households from 47 villages in 3 sites	Women's assets at marriage and current assets	Expenditure shares of food, clothing, children's education	Wife's assets have a positive and significant effect on the share of expenditures on children's clothing and education while husband's current assets have a positive effect on food expenditure share.
Quisumbing and Maluccio 1999 Bangladesh, Indonesia, Ethiopia, South Africa	Analyzed data from IFPRI surveys of 826 households in Bangladesh and 114 households in Indonesia. Also analyzed data on 1500 households from the 1997 Ethiopian Rural Household Survey and data on 500 households from the 1998 Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development in KwaZulu-Natal	Women's assets at marriage	Expenditure shares of food, education, health, children's clothing, alcohol/tobacco use, and child schooling	When women control more resources expenditures on education increase, but not equally for girls and boys across nations. Effects on other expenditures vary by region.
Thomas 1997 Thomas 1990 Brazil	Analyzed data on 55,000 households from the Estudio Nacional da Despesa Familiar (ENDEF) Survey	Male and female nonlabor income, total income, and women's control of income	Expenditure shares, nutrient intakes per capita in household, and child anthropometric outcomes	Women's income is spent more on human capital investments and is associated with greater nutrient intake and better child health.

Study and Location	Sample and Design	Indicators of Empowerment (as independent or intermediary variable(s))	Dependent Variable(s)	Findings
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH				
Beagle, Frankenberg and Thomas 1998 Indonesia	Analyzed data on about 2,000 couples from the 1997-8 Indonesia Family Life survey	Women's characteristics (e.g., individual assets, education; social status of family of origin, and education of father)	Prenatal care and hospital delivery	Individual assets, education, and social status of a woman increase her chances of getting prenatal and delivery care.
Blanc and Wolff 2000 Wolff et al. 2000 Uganda	Surveyed 1,356 women and their stable partners and conducted 34 focus groups with women and men in 2 districts	Negotiation and discussion of sex between partners	Condom use	The influence of marriage and women's work varies by district, but education and urban residence consistently enhance women's negotiating abilities.
Hindin 2000 Zimbabwe	Analyzed data on 1861 women who had given birth in the last 3 years from the 1994 Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey	Women's role in household decision-making on major purchases and participation in waged work	Women's anthropometric status (BMI and Chronic Energy Deficiency)	Women with no control in the household are more likely to have a lower BMI. Thus, lack of control can compromise women's health.
INVESTMENT IN DEVELOPMENT				
Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2001 India	Surveyed 1/3 of all women councilors in 161 village councils and interviewed villagers in one village from each of 3 village council areas in Birbhum district, West Bengal	Women's participation in village council (e.g., questions, requests, and complaints from women at the village council)	Public goods investment in roads, drinking water, fuel equipment, education, and health	Women are more likely to participate if the leader of the council is a woman and invest more in infrastructure that is directly relevant to rural women's needs (water, fuel, health, roads, etc.); men invest more in education.

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