

Into, Through and Beyond USAID Programs: Lessons from the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

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Speakers



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Lessons from the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)

**Bureau for Resilience and Food Security
Program Office/Inclusive Development Division**

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USAID launches 2023 Gender Policy



2023 GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT POLICY



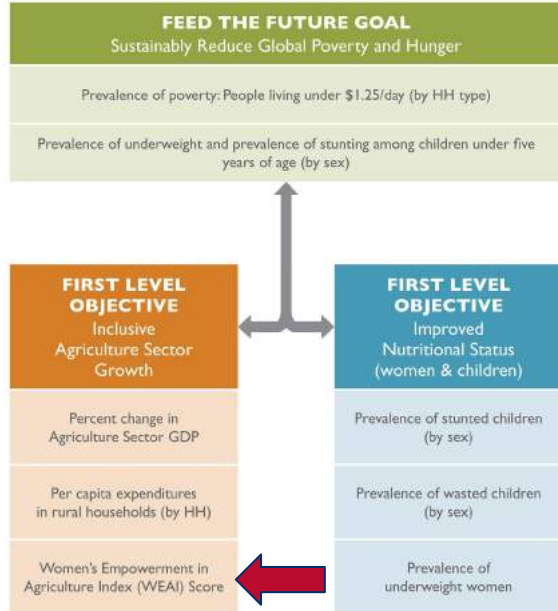
Policy Objectives

1. Reduce gender disparities in who accesses, controls, and benefits from economic, social, political, legal, educational, health, and cultural resources, as well as wealth, opportunities, and services.
2. Strive to eliminate GBV and mitigate its harmful effects on individuals and communities, so all people can live free from violence.
3. Increase the capability of women and girls to fully exercise their rights, determine their life outcomes, assume leadership roles, and influence decision-making in households, communities, and societies.
4. Advance structural changes that address the root causes of gender inequality and promote equitable gender norms.

Why a WEAI?

Feed the Future/Phase one

FEED THE FUTURE RESULTS FRAMEWORK

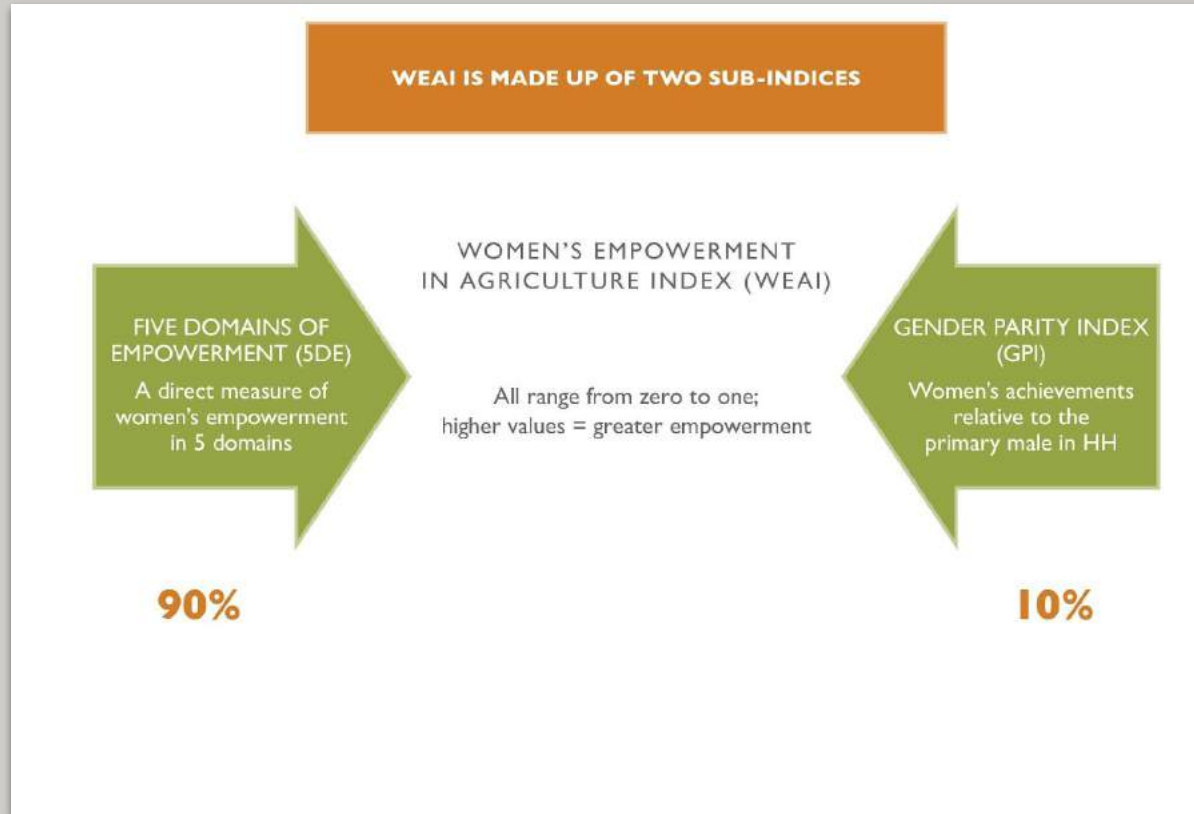


Updated Global Food Security Strategy Results Framework

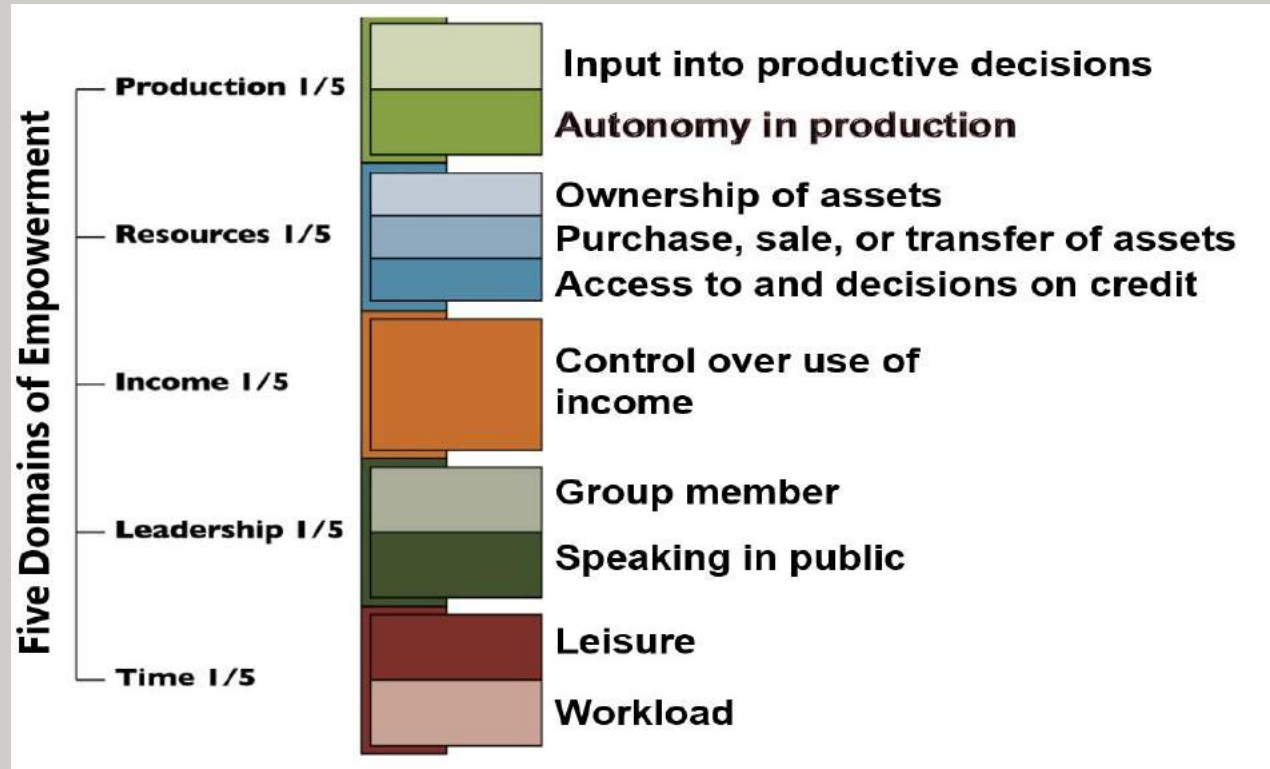


- ★ **Objective 1: Inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led economic growth**
- ★ **Inclusion, equality and equity** are essential for achieving all three objectives.
- ★ Used to measure and track **inclusion and empowerment** in the agriculture sector as a result of Feed the Future programs.

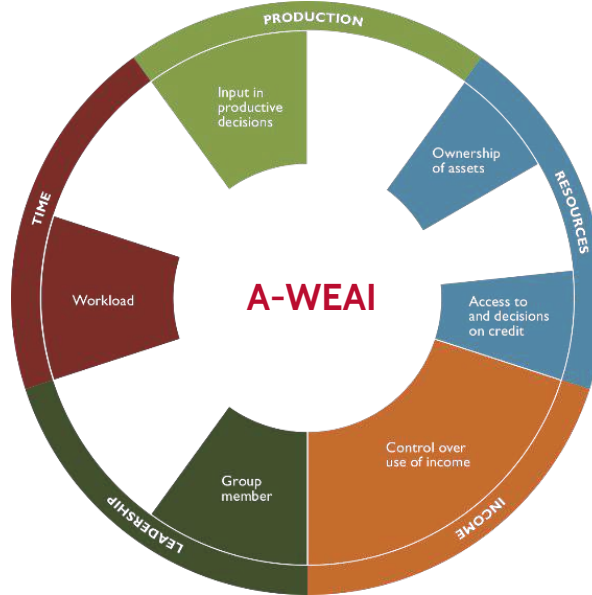
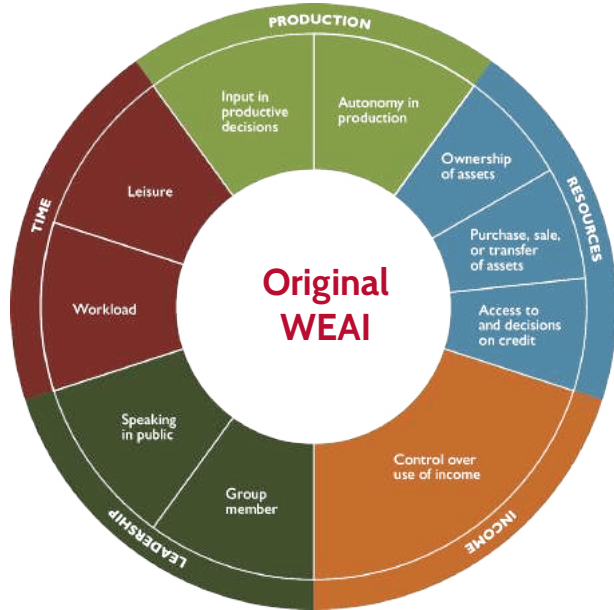
Quick refresher | How is the WEAI constructed?



WEAI: Five Domains of Empowerment, 10 indicators



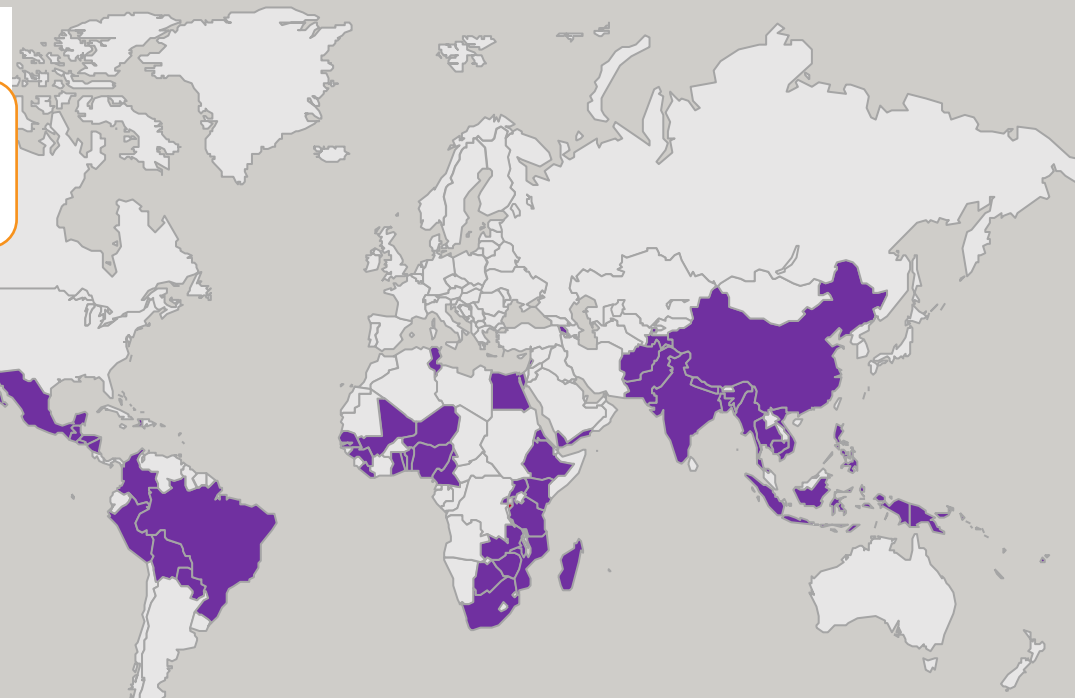
Evolution of WEAI metrics: WEAI, Abbreviated WEAI (A-WEAI), and Project-level WEAI (pro-WEAI)



What did we learn? How have WEAI-based metrics been used?

2022

WEAI turns 10!
58 countries total
232 organizations total



2011

3 countries
4 orgs

2012

21 countries
4 orgs

2015

26 countries
41 orgs

2016

39 countries
78 orgs

2017

47 countries
91 orgs

2018

50 countries
122 orgs

2019

52 countries
184 orgs

2020

54 countries
200 orgs

2021

58 countries
231 orgs

2022

10th
anniversary

Thank you!

Exploring 10+ Years of WEAI at USAID

Insights and Discoveries





Methods



- Over **250,000** documents from the Development Clearing House (DEC)
- **Goal:** Understand how the WEAI has been implemented within USAID projects and activities over the past decade
- Machine learning technology was used to identify and classify over **2,500** use cases of the WEAI
- Data architecture constructed from the State of Food and Agriculture (FAO, 2022) Framework and from consultation with IFPRI experts
- Data is aggregated into the **WEAI Dashboard** which displays analytics related to the research questions
- Future policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equality in agriculture can be informed by these insights

RESEARCH QUESTIONS



Research Question 1: Use of WEAI

How has the WEAI been utilized within USAID projects, and who are the main stakeholders engaging with it?

Research Question 2: Lessons & Recommendations

What are the key lessons and recommendations from use cases of the WEAI in USAID projects?

Research Question 3: WEAI and Food Systems Framework

How do the use cases align with the gender and food systems framework adopted by the State of Food and Agriculture (FAO, 2022)?



Question 1: Use of WEAI

How has the WEAI been utilized within USAID projects, and who are the main stakeholders engaging with it?

COUNTRY BREAKDOWN OF PROJECTS USING WEAI

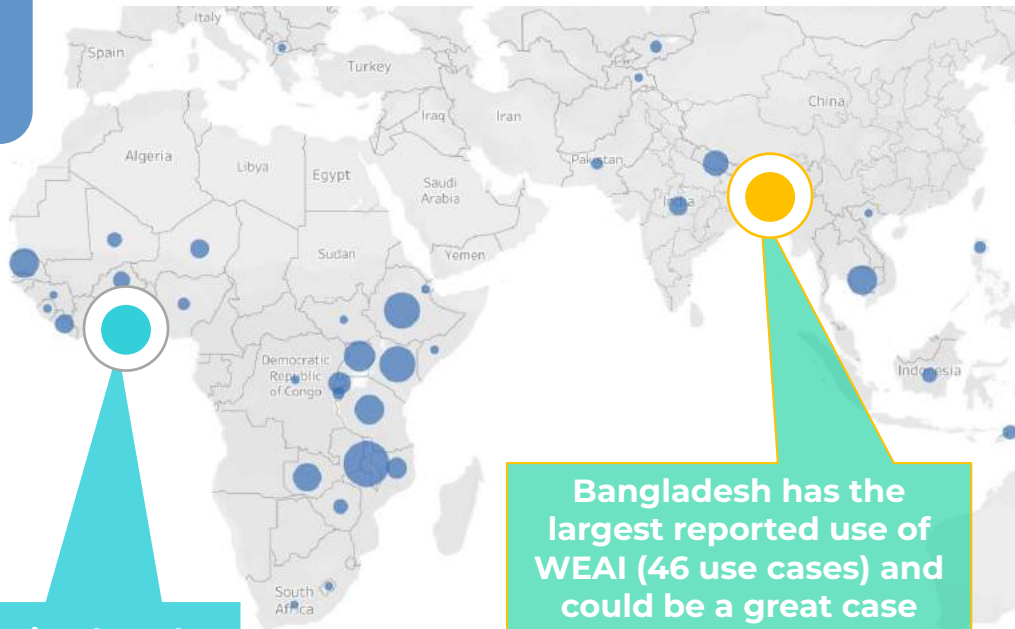


263,079 Documents searched on WEAI **2,500** Observations extracted

While the adoption of the WEAI has been widespread and has gained popularity in certain regions, there is a need to promote its use in other parts of the world to better assess and address gender inequalities in agriculture



South America has the fewest reported uses of WEAI



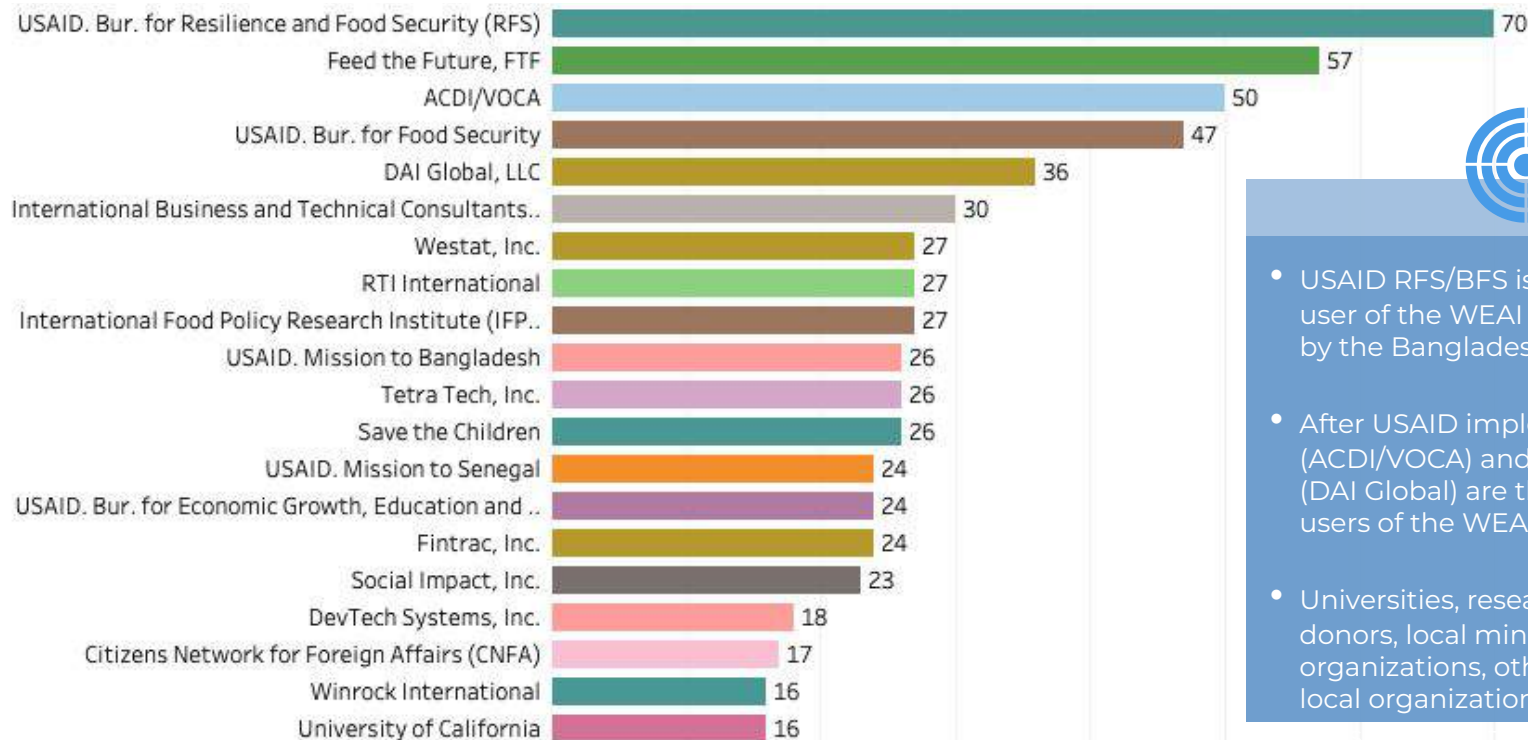
The Africa region has the most reported uses of WEAI with Ghana leading the way (28 use cases)

Bangladesh has the largest reported use of WEAI (46 use cases) and could be a great case study to popularize the WEAI in other countries in Asia particularly Southeast Asia and India.

WEAI STAKEHOLDERS



The WEAI has gained widespread recognition and use among various organizations and institutions worldwide, indicating its effectiveness in addressing gender inequalities in the agricultural sector.



- USAID RFS/BFS is the the primary user of the WEAI at USAID followed by the Bangladesh Mission
- After USAID implementing NGOs (ACDI/VOCA) and Private Companies (DAI Global) are the second largest users of the WEAI.
- Universities, research institutes, other donors, local ministries, International organizations, other US Agencies, and local organizations also popular

USE CASES



Use cases of the WEAI are diverse and demonstrate the tool's versatility in addressing a wide range of applications.

Identifying Constraints: WEAI identifies obstacles faced by women in agriculture, enabling stakeholders to revise policies and programs addressing gender inequalities.

EXAMPLE |



Naatal Mbay Project, Senegal

Informing Policy and Strategy Decisions: The WEAI reveals rich information on gender inequalities enabling stakeholders to improve strategy and policy design

EXAMPLE |



Feed the Future strategy's gender-sensitive approach

Monitoring Progress: The WEAI tracks changes in women's empowerment levels resulting from specific project interventions and monitors progress towards gender equality goals over time.

EXAMPLE |



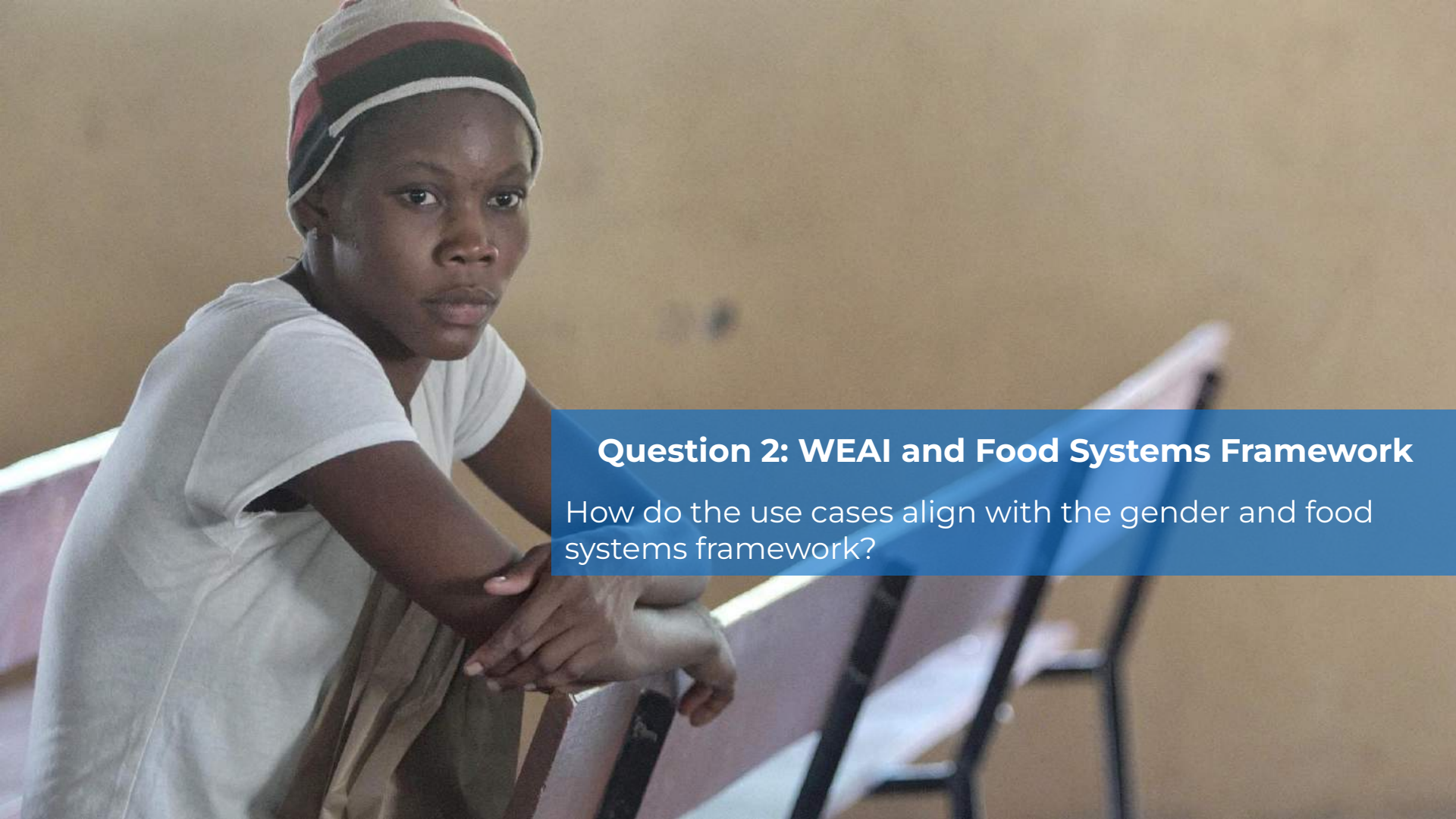
Livestock Production for Improved Nutrition, Bangladesh

Understanding Gender Dynamics: The WEAI measures women's empowerment relative to men providing stakeholders with a more robust understanding of gender dynamics

EXAMPLE |



SPRING project, Bangladesh



Question 2: WEAI and Food Systems Framework

How do the use cases align with the gender and food systems framework?

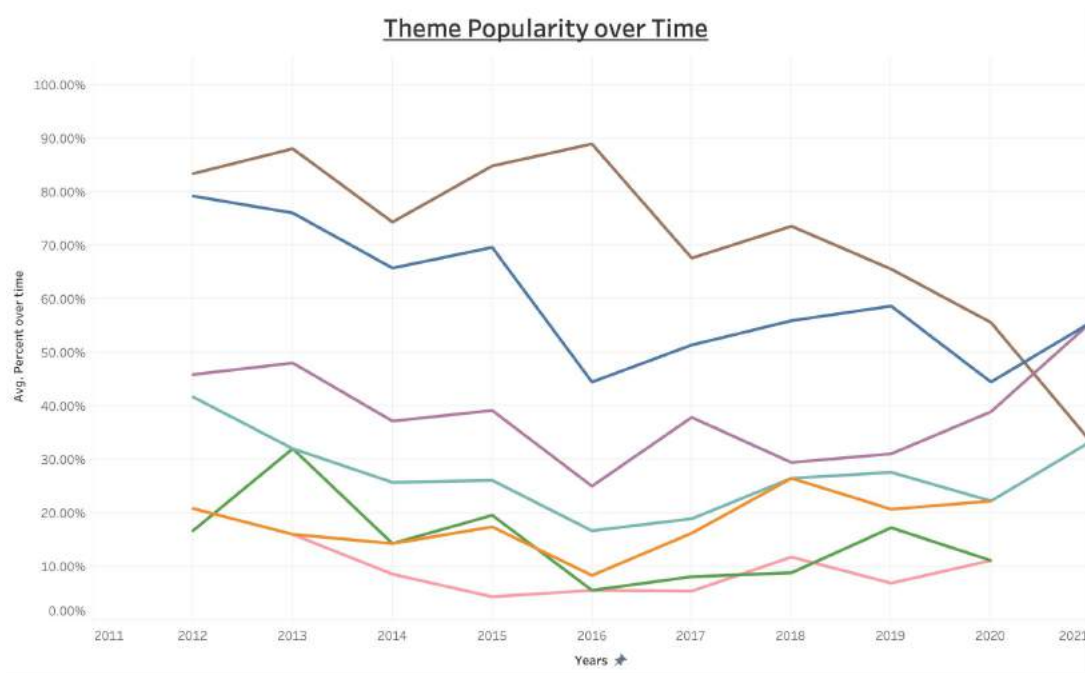
TRENDS OVER TIME



In recent years, there has been a shift in the use of WEAI towards nutrition and dietary diversity reflecting changes in priorities and needs of stakeholders.

Theme Code (Popularity ..

- Agricultural product..
- Education
- Household-level foo..
- Individual Diets
- Nutrition
- WASH
- Women's empower..



This y-axis represents the ratio of number of times a theme was reported per year to overall reports of WEAI per year.

- In 2020, Nutrition overtook Agricultural Productivity as the most popular theme
- The biggest usage gaps lie in the Life Satisfaction, WASH, and Environmental Outcomes themes
- It appears that the Women's Empowerment theme has been increasing in popularity recently, however this is likely due to a time lag in the data being uploaded into the DEC.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



Women are found to be more disempowered than men across all indicators and all reported use cases.



Credit

- According to findings from the WEAI baseline survey, for the majority of countries the greatest constraints on empowering women in agriculture is lack of access to credit and the power to make credit related decisions (Getting to Zero, 2015)

Example: The WEAI cites access to and decisions on credit as one of the main constraints contributing to the disempowerment of both men and women in Honduras. (MERCADO project)



Leadership

- In over 50 projects, women were reported to be excluded from local planning processes, including the identification of priorities, developing policies, budgeting, consultation, and adoption of resolutions.

Example: The SNV EOWE A-WEAI mid-term review found that gender-inclusive training was an effective intervention that resulted in increased involvement by women in community leadership.



Division of Labor

- WEAI's time-use indicator has provided insights into the gendered division of labor within households and communities, and has help identify ways to reduce women's work burden and promote a more equitable distribution of labor.

Example: a 2018 WEAI survey in North Macedonia indicated that women in agriculture work an average of over 11 hours per day, with 42% of that time unpaid, while men work an average of 9.7 hours, which is mainly paid.

AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION



Agricultural production is a crucial area where women face significant challenges due to gender disparities in access to resources, technology, and markets.

ACCESS TO FINANCE & INPUTS

- One of the most commonly mentioned constraints is access to and decisions on credit and finances.
- The challenge of accessing financial services further hinders the ability of women to acquire inputs, which, in turn, further restricts women's ability to participate in agricultural production.
- These results are consistent with findings from the baseline survey that collected the abbreviated WEAI (A-WEAI), which found women to be disempowered in decision-making in ownership of assets, access to and credit decisions, and in control over the use of income.

TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

- Access to technology is also a common constraint for women within the agriculture sector
- The Victory Against Malnutrition Plus (VIMPLUS) project found that WEAI results in Burkina Faso and Niger indicate that without adequate access to important technologies that can improve their economic productivity, women will continue to be limited in their empowerment.

NUTRITION



The WEAI was reported in 96 use cases to measure the relationship between women's empowerment and nutritional status

- WEAI data on nutrition is commonly used to identify actions and investments that can leverage agricultural development for improved nutrition and to make recommendations on how to invigorate pathways to women's empowerment.
- The Feed the Future Tanzania Land Tenure Assistance (LTA) project utilized the WEAI to measure the relationship between women's empowerment and stunting among children under five years old in Tanzania.



DIETARY DIVERSITY AND FOOD SECURITY



The WEAI was most frequently employed to assess the relationship between women's decision-making power and their control over their diet as well as the diet of their children.



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The Resilience and Economic Growth in the Sahel (REGIS-ER) project used the WEAI to measure changes in women's empowerment and nutrition status in Niger. The project found a positive correlation between improvement in women's empowerment and improvements in household dietary diversity and micronutrient intake.

OTHER TOPICS



- Environmental Outcomes: The Feed the Future Ghana Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Project used the WEAI to assess women's empowerment in agriculture and how it relates to their adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices, such as small-scale irrigation, soil and water conservation, and drought-tolerant high-yielding crop varieties. The project found that women who were more empowered in agriculture were more likely to adopt climate-smart agricultural practices.
- WASH, Education, and Life Satisfaction were the least reported use cases of the WEAI



AGRILINKS

A woman with dark hair in a colorful, patterned dress is smiling while looking at a smartphone. She is also holding a small, dark electronic device connected to the phone by a cable. The background shows a rustic setting with wooden beams and a large basket of fresh green herbs hanging from a wooden structure. A blue bucket is visible in the lower right corner.

Question 3: Lessons & Recommendations

What are the key lessons and recommendations from use cases of the WEAI in USAID projects?

LESSONS & RECOMMENDATIONS



ABBREVIATED SURVEY



- Shortening survey modules was identified across use cases as an effective strategy to reduce respondent burden, minimize selection bias, and improve response rates.
- A baseline study in Malawi found that the A-WEAI shortened the time to implement WEAI interviews by approximately 30 percent.
- While it is not recommended to arbitrarily drop survey questions as it could compromise comparability and the integrity of the index, the use of the A-WEAI was widely found to result in more accurate and

CHALLENGES FACED BY RESPONDENTS



- The topic of women's empowerment is especially prone to sociocultural influences that can potentially introduce biases into the WEAI results.
- For example, one survey respondent in Zambia stated, "There is intimidation in telling the truth because they may think they would be judged if the woman runs the home or only the man runs the home."
- Similarly, in Zambia, one survey respondent reported, "It makes someone wonder why someone would want to know your household dynamics. What are their intentions? I was not comfortable with the way the question was coming out."
- It is recommended to address these concerns by explaining the purpose of the survey and emphasizing the confidentiality of responses as well as adapting when possible to cultural norms and alleviate discomfort

NUANCE



- There is a need for more nuanced ways of measuring certain WEAI domains, such as time use, decision-making, quality of leadership, and group participation so that these domains can be better understood.
- It is recommended to go beyond the quantitative WEAI questionnaire and investigate broader gender issues through additional focus groups and targeted interviews. For example, the project-level WEAI (pro-WEAI) [qualitative protocols](#) can be used alongside the WEAI survey to probe these issues.



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DevelopMetrics

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FEED THE FUTURE



INTERNATIONAL
FOOD POLICY
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

Designing effective nutrition- and gender-sensitive programs and policies in rural Bangladesh

Akhter U. Ahmed and M. Mehrab Bakhtiar, IFPRI



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Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey (BIHS)

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Generating high quality data for evidence-based policies and programs

- Most comprehensive, nationally representative rural household survey to date; largest panel
- Funded by USAID
- Generates data for evidence-based research
- Used for assessing Feed the Future performance
- Unique features:
 - Plot-level agricultural production and practices
 - Individual dietary intake of all household members
 - Anthropometric measurements of all household members
 - Data to estimate the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)

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Key empowerment findings from BIHS

Key Results

Women's empowerment score is positively associated with calorie availability and dietary diversity at the household-level (Sraboni et al. 2014)

A reduced empowerment gap between spouses was associated with higher levels of technical efficiency (Seymour et al. 2017)

Higher women's empowerment scores reduce the likelihood of households remaining in chronic and transient poverty (Ahmed and Tauseef 2022)

Impact/Reach



Top 5% of all research outputs ever tracked

Top 25% of all research outputs scored

Top 25% of all research outputs ever tracked

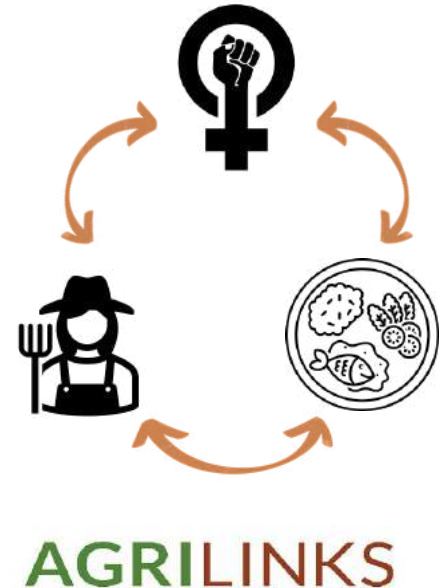
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Agriculture, Nutrition, and Gender Linkages (ANGeL) project

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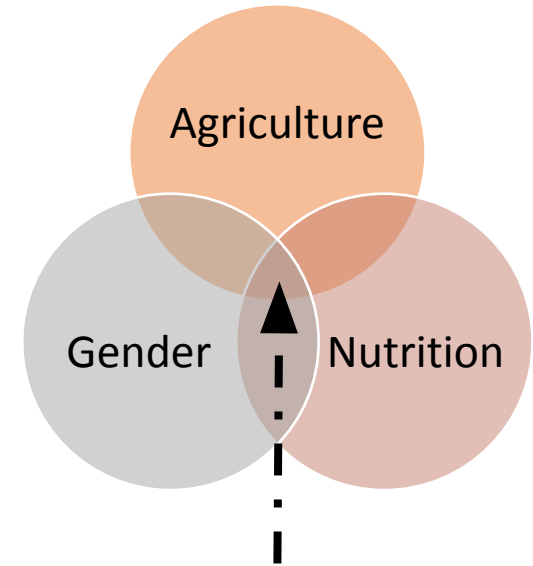
Motivation to strengthen agriculture-nutrition-gender nexus in Bangladesh

- Analyzing data from IFPRI's 2011/2012 BIHS, IFPRI's research found:
 - Agricultural diversity is positively associated with household and child dietary diversity and diet quality.
 - Women's empowerment (measured by WEAI) is positively associated with household, child, and maternal dietary diversity.
 - Agricultural diversity is positively associated with women's empowerment in agriculture.



Agriculture, Nutrition, Gender Linkages (ANGeL): Impact Evaluation Design

- ANGeL was jointly funded by USAID and Gov't of Bangladesh; implemented by Min. of Agriculture
- IFPRI designed ANGeL and evaluated impacts using a cluster randomized controlled trial with 4 interventions (trainings husbands and wives, together):
 - Nutrition behavior change communication (BCC)
 - Ag production
 - Ag production + Nutrition BCC
 - Ag production + Nutrition BCC + Gender sensitization



ANGeL aimed to strengthen the agriculture-nutrition-gender nexus

ANGeL: Key Takeaways

ANGeL engaged men and women in activities that are associated with increased:

- Ag production and nutrition knowledge
- Production of select non-rice crops
- Consumption of foods with high nutrient values
- Household dietary diversity
- Empowerment of women and men
- Gender parity between women and men in households

Longstanding policy support toward WEAI

- **2012:** State Minister of Women & Children Affairs recognized WEAI's potential to address challenges rural women face
- **2018:** Motivated by WEAI, National Agriculture Policy adds women's empowerment section
- **2020:** Based on robust results, the Ministry of Agriculture approved ANGeL national scale-up
- **2022:** Speaker of Parliament reaffirmed WEAI's contribution to inform gender-sensitive policies



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Thank You

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Q&A

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