WHY FOCUS ON WOMEN’S DECISION-MAKING POWER IN AGRICULTURE SYSTEMS PROGRAMMING?

INTRODUCTION

The decision-making context and related gender dynamics within households, businesses, and institutions can have a direct effect on food security outcomes and resilience capacities. Women’s and other underserved and underrepresented groups’ limited agency and decision-making power within the agriculture sector are barriers to achieving Feed the Future’s long-term programming goals, as well as broader women’s economic empowerment and gender equality gains.

WHAT DECISION-MAKING REFERS TO

Decision-making refers to an individual’s ability and power to make and act on decisions and control resources and profits.

Many factors affect the decision-making power of women and men to “decide, influence, and exercise control over material, human, intellectual, and financial resources.” As shown in the graphic below, agriculture and food-related decisions are influenced by a range of factors according to the spheres in which decisions are made—whether within the household, in workplaces and workspaces (e.g., fields or job sites), or in supporting institutions (like in public meeting places and banks).

Note 1
“Why Focus on Women’s Decision-Making Power in Agriculture Systems Programming?” explains what decision-making is, why it matters in Feed the Future programming, and how USAID can address imbalances of power and agency for better food security outcomes.

Note 2
“How to Integrate Women’s Decision-Making Considerations into Agricultural Programming” provides guidance on how to integrate women’s decision-making into the USAID Program Cycle.

Note 3
Exhibit 1. Influencing factors within the spheres of women’s decision-making

Women and men’s decision-making power in these spheres—where key agricultural decisions related to, for example, production, processing, marketing, and consumption are made—can promote or constrain productivity, profit, and resilience capacity of the household, business, community, or institution. The decision-making power dynamics within each sphere influence, and are often influenced by, other spheres. For example, household decisions on who engages in extension or other technical training are often shaped by institutional norms, policies, and practices around who is considered the head-of-household farmer. Similarly, the legal and policy framework that limits women’s ownership or control over land can shape who in the household can make and act on decisions regarding adoption of new farming practices.

Finally, decision-making around household labor and care responsibilities may limit or enable who within households can commit to full-time employment or participation or leadership positions within community organizations. A 2018 research study in Kenya found that women’s participation in community leadership was associated with higher agricultural productivity, and that women in more food-secure households tended to be more likely to participate in community leadership.

It is useful to consider the spheres in which women make decisions vis-à-vis a program’s agricultural development and food security goals. Programmatic interventions that seek to promote more agency or decision-making power for women in a particular sphere may prove integral to shifting power dynamics at various other spheres, and to achieving additional programmatic outcomes and impact.

The table on the next page presents illustrative decisions that may be made in the household, workplaces and workspaces, and community and institution as they relate to agricultural market systems and food security programming. The illustrative decisions are organized by the domains established in the Gender Integration Framework (GIF), which seeks to promote agricultural productivity, food security, and resilience outcomes.
As illustrated above, there are many kinds of decisions, in various domains, that are relevant to the power dynamics of an agricultural market system. Decisions may be made unilaterally, by one individual, or with input, determination, and responsibility shared between spouses and other family members, employees, owners, community members, producer organization members, government institutions, and others. It is important to recognize the power dynamics of who is making what kinds of decisions and what impacts those decisions may have for programming to be effective.
Feed the Future's Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS) includes gender equality and women’s empowerment as a cross-cutting intermediate result and outlines key linkages and priorities to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment. This gender equality and women’s empowerment component—including a focus on promoting women’s decision-making power—contributes to Feed the Future’s three objectives to sustainably reduce global poverty, hunger, and malnutrition and intersect with all intermediate results related to these objectives.

Explicitly addressing gender inequality and decision-making power dynamics within agricultural market systems can improve the achievement of program outcomes and goals. The GFSS points to the Feed the Future Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) and the Gender Integration Framework (GIF) to address and promote equitable decision-making within agriculture. Missions and implementing partners can use WEAI and GIF data to prioritize women’s empowerment constraints, develop strategic activities, and monitor and evaluate outcomes. By intentionally programming to improve women’s decision-making power, USAID can begin to transform harmful intrahousehold, institutional, and systemic dynamics to promote women’s agricultural productivity and empowerment.

**Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index:** “The WEAI is an innovative tool composed of two sub-indices: one measures women’s empowerment across five domains in agriculture, and the other measures gender parity in empowerment within the household. The tool also measures women’s empowerment relative to men within their households.” (See Note 3 for more information on the WEAI.)

**Gender Integration Framework:** “The GIF uses seven domains of empowerment that are linked to household agricultural productivity: agricultural decision-making, access to and control over resources, control over income, leadership, time use, human capital, and access to technology. The WEAI measures the first five GIF domains. Missions and partners can plug data into the framework to map planned and future activities and identify gaps. The GIF can also be used to identify and track indicators that measure priority outcome areas.” (See Note 2 for more information on the GIF.)

The box below provides examples where a Project or Activity might integrate women’s decision-making power as a major or minor focus for agriculture-led economic growth and food security goals. See Note 2 for more information on integrating women’s decision-making power into the Program Cycle.

**Examples of Programmatic Approaches to Improve Women’s Decision-Making Power**

- Social norms change methods (e.g., household dialogues)
- Components of technical agricultural training (e.g., planting, inputs, marketing)
- Role models, mentors, and gender champions (e.g., within producer organizations)
- Leadership, business, and literacy/numeracy skills (e.g., training men on the value of women leaders)
- Participation and leadership quotas (e.g., not just sit, exert influence)
- Women-only spaces (e.g., alternative or parallel spaces, not just mixed)
- Gender training with decision-making components
- Access to finance and assets with targeted components on women’s decision-making power
- Encouraging active participation in institutions
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