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Women's Economic Empowerment: What We Measure and Why It Matters

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McGill



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Motivation

- Increased global attention on Women's Economic Empowerment
- Sustainable Development Goals
- Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy
- Acceleration of Development programming





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Motivation

Laszlo and Grantham (2018) – review of IDRC's 14 GrOW projects

🏠 Over 40 different measures used in 32 documents

🏠 Most common:

★ Women's labour market outcomes (n=27)

★ Women's educational attainment (n=21)

★ Women's autonomy in household decision-making (n=18)

★ Gender equality in social norms (n=9)

★ Gender equality in legal institutions (n=9)

Laszlo et al. (2018) – literature survey



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A Definition



“Women's empowerment is about the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability.”

Kabeer (1999)



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A Definition

*“The ability to exercise choice incorporates three inter-related dimensions: **resources** (defined broadly to include not only access, but also future claims, to both material and human and social resources); **agency** (including processes of decision making, as well as less measurable manifestations of agency such as negotiation, deception and manipulation); and **achievements** (well-being outcomes).”*

Kabeer (1999)



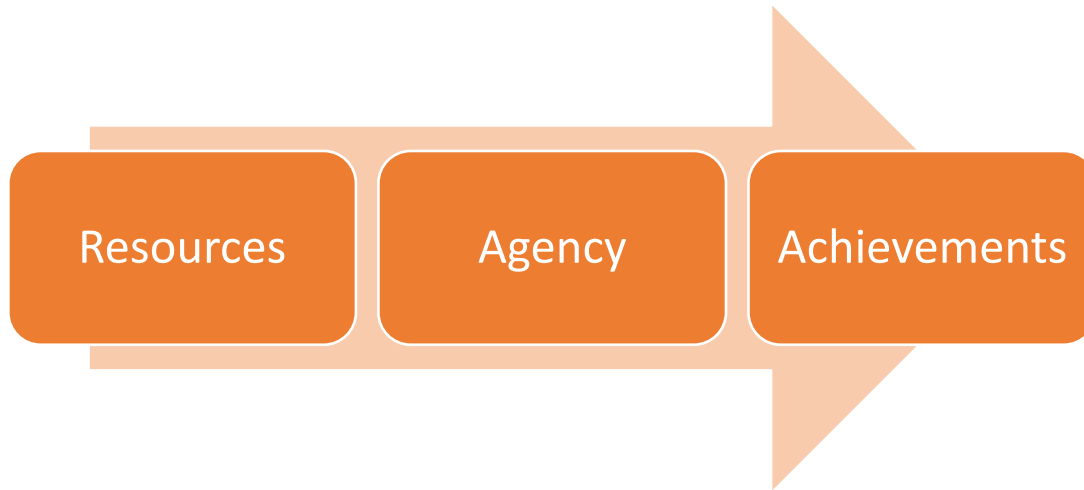
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From concept to measurement



Challenges

- ⊞ Normative
- ⊞ Multidimensional
- ⊞ Complex
- ⊞ Abstract
- ⊞ Context specific



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Purpose of measurement



EVALUATE
SITUATION



DESIGN
POLICIES



IMPLEMENT
POLICIES



EVALUATE
IMPACT



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Considerations for measurement

Consider *theory of change*:

- ⦿ What is your research/policy question?
- ⦿ In what way *would* your intervention influence WEE?
- ⦿ What does the theory say?
- ⦿ What is the existing state of the evidence?





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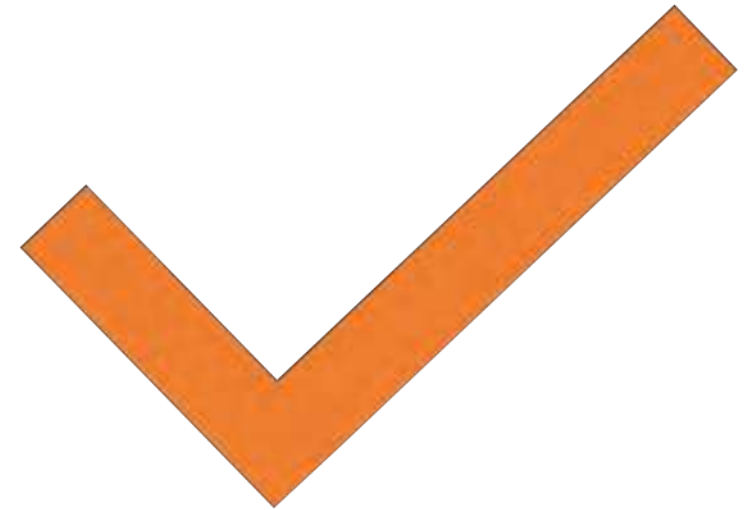


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Considerations for measurement

Measurement criteria:

- ⦿ Observability
- ⦿ Relevance
- ⦿ Actionable





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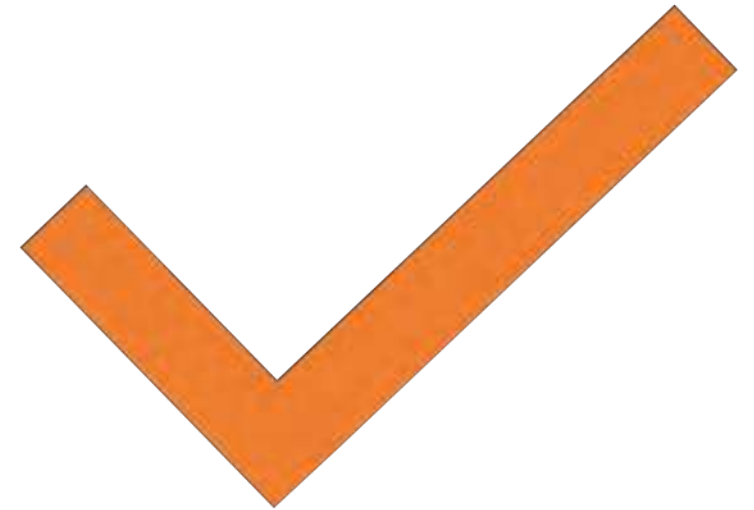


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Considerations for measurement

Measurement criteria:

🕒 Observability: How easily can you collect this data?





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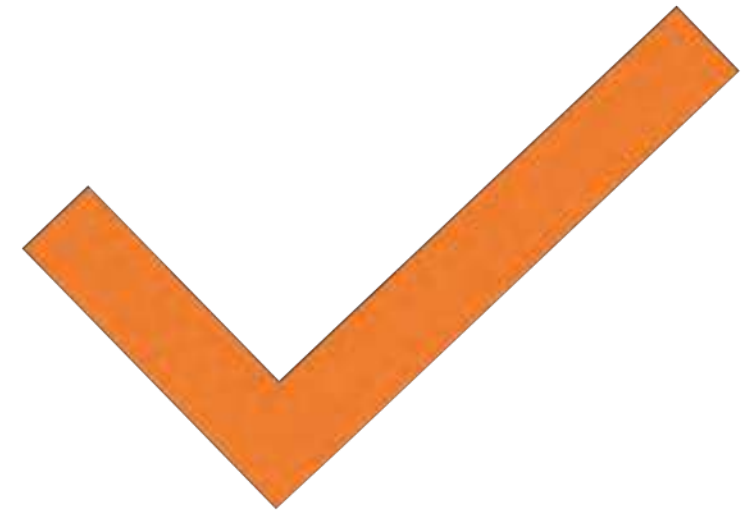


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Considerations for measurement

Measurement criteria:

- ⦿ Relevance: how closely does it relate to what you want to measure?





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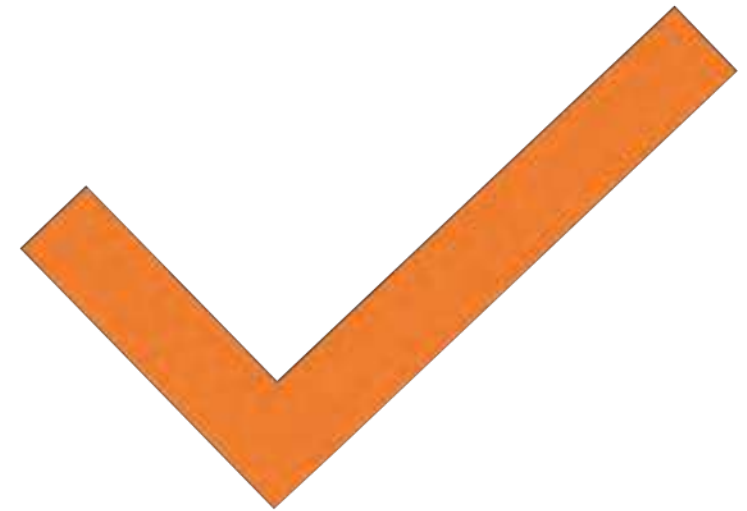


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Considerations for measurement

Measurement criteria:

- ⦿ Actionable: “measurement that has the potential to be acted upon, or is designed with action in mind.” [\(Gates Foundation\)](#)





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Considerations for measurement

Implementation considerations:

- ⊞ Local context (culture) matters
- ⊞ Language
- ⊞ Cognitive ability
- ⊞ Survey fatigue
- ⊞ Expense





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Considerations for measurement

Why is it important to “get it right”?

- ⊞ Misdiagnose the problem
- ⊞ Provide undesirable policy recommendations
- ⊞ Measurement error → Statistical biases



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Example



Baseline:
Work = No





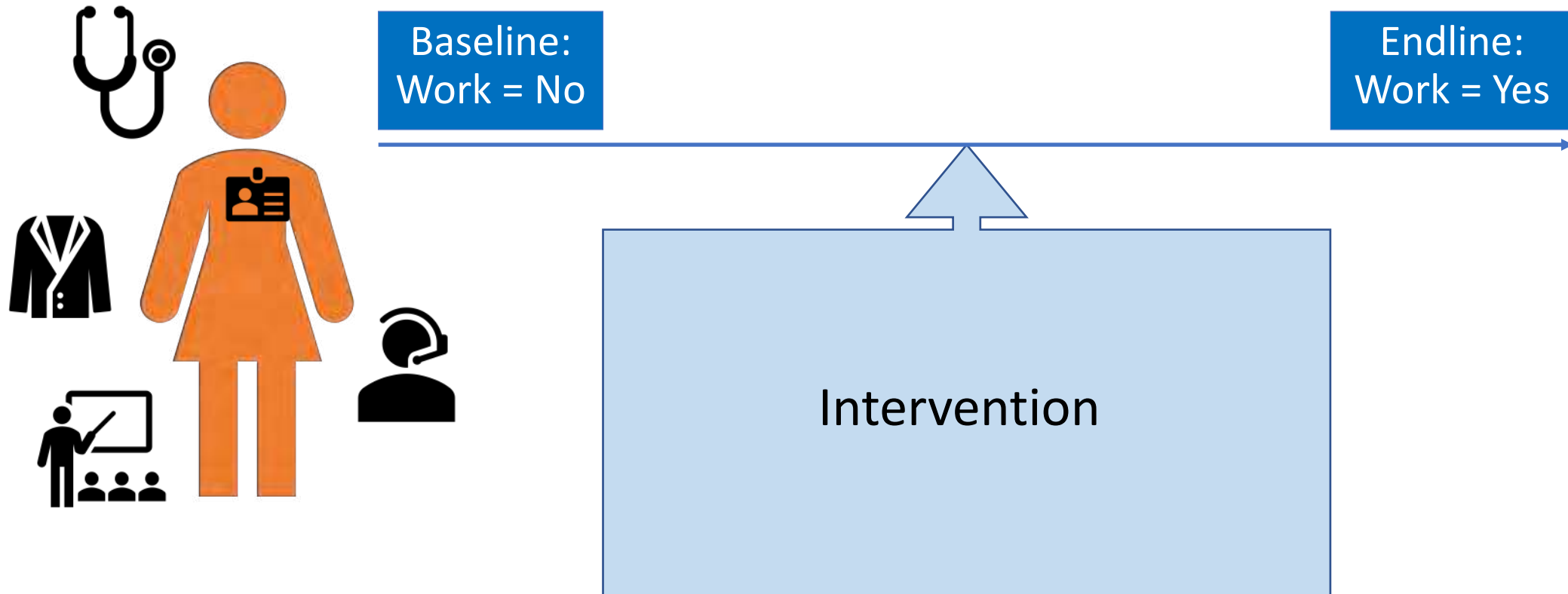
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Example





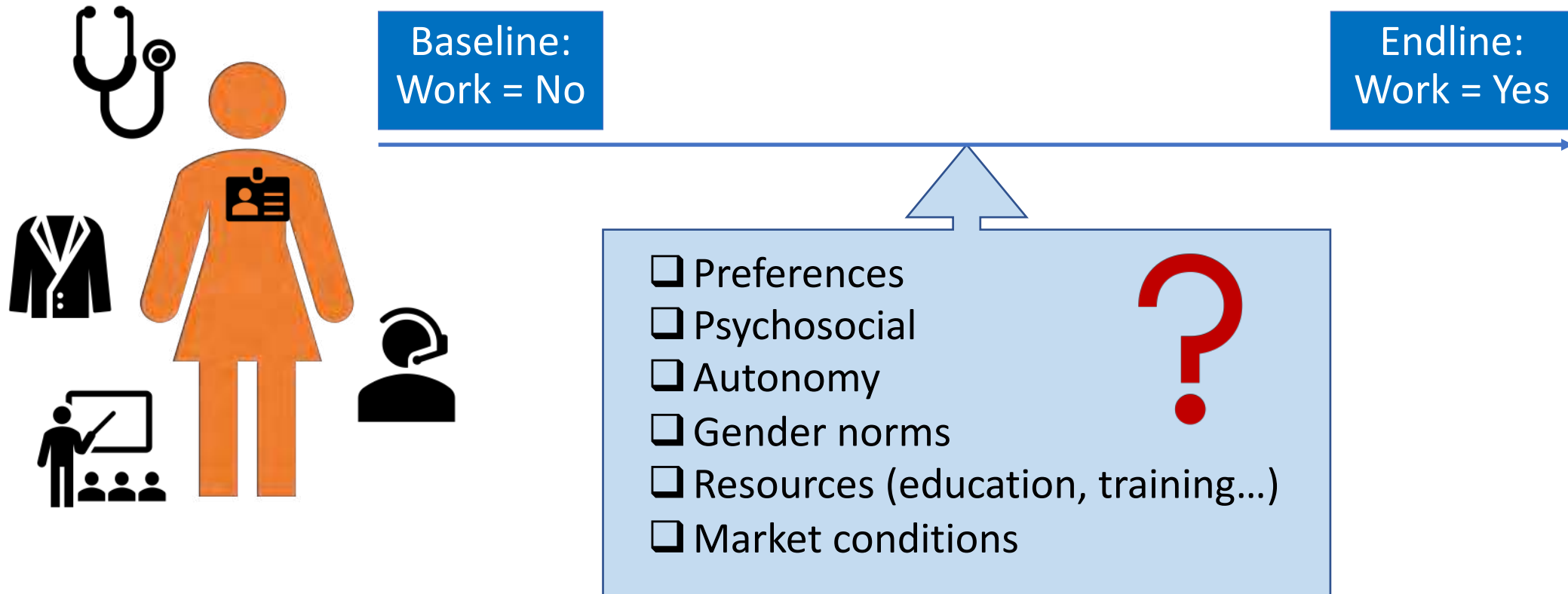
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Example





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Example



Baseline:
Work = No

Endline:
Work = Yes

- ⊞ What is the *mechanism*?
- ⊞ Tailor your *metric* to the *mechanism*
- ⊞ May require *different* instrument(s) depending on *mechanism*(s)
- ⊞ What does your *context* imply for measurement?



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Example



Baseline:
Work = No

Endline:
Work = Yes

⚙️ Is **WORK = Yes/No**

☆ Observable? ✓

☆ Relevant? ✓

☆ Actionable? ?



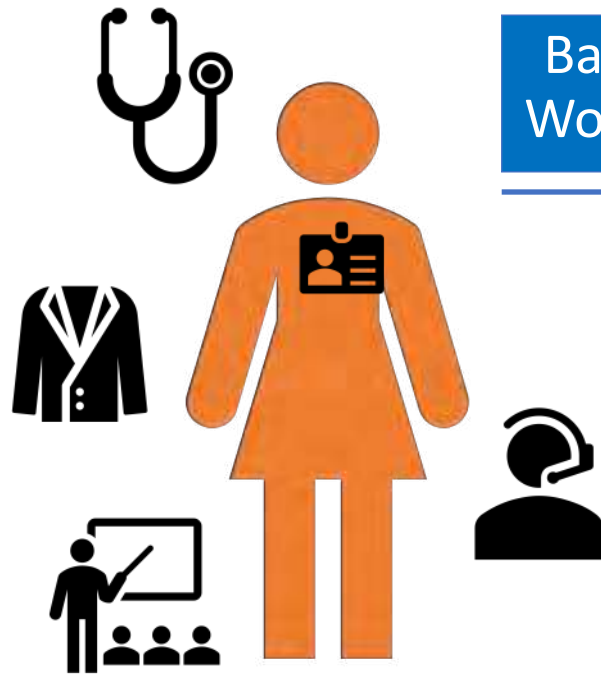
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Example



Baseline:
Work = No

Endline:
Work = Yes

- ⚙️ Is **WORK = Yes** really what you want to measure?
- ☆ Working conditions?
 - ☆ Job security?
 - ☆ Wages?
 - ☆ Hours?
 - ☆ Work-life balance?



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World Bank paper (Donald et al. 2017)

🏠 Define Agency

- ☆ Kabeer (1999): *“ability to define one’s goals and act on them”*
- ☆ Sen (1985): *“agency freedom as the freedom to achieve whatever the person, as a responsible agent, decides he or she should achieve”*

🏠 Autonomy vs Bargaining Power

- ☆ Psychology literature: autonomy → individuals’ actions regulated by self
- ☆ Economics literature: bargaining power → ability to assert one’s preferences in household decision-making (*relational*)



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Agency

⊞ Defining goals

- ☆ Relative Autonomy Index (RAI)
- ☆ Goal-setting Questionnaire

⊞ Perceiving control and ability to achieve goals

- ☆ Locus of control
- ☆ Self-efficacy
- ☆ Sense of agency

⊞ Acting on goals

- ☆ Intrahousehold Bargaining
- ☆ DHS vs WEAI

RAI is constructed from answers to the following:

- (1) “My actions in [activity area] are partly because I will get in trouble with someone if I act differently,”
- (2) “Regarding [activity area] I do what I do so others don’t think poorly of me,” and
- (3) “Regarding [activity area] I do what I do because I personally think it is the right thing to do.”



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⦿ Acting on goals

- ☆ Intrahousehold Bargaining
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RAI is constructed from answers to the following:

- (1) “My actions in [activity area] are partly because I will get in trouble with someone if I act differently,” **External (coerced)**
- (2) “Regarding [activity area] I do what I do so others don’t think poorly of me,” **Introjected**
- (3) “Regarding [activity area] I do what I do because I personally think it is the right thing to do.” **Autonomous**



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Goal Setting Questionnaire:

1. I understand exactly what I am supposed to do on my job.
2. I have specific, clear goals to aim for in my job.
6. If I have more than one goal to accomplish, I know which ones are most important and which ones are least important.
21. Usually feel that I have a suitable or effective action plan or plans for reaching my goals.
37. I find working toward my goals to be very stressful.
41. I have too many goals on this job (I am overloaded)



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Rotter Internal-External Locus of control scale (sample):

- Many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck.
 - People's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make.
-
- In my case, getting what I want has little or nothing to do with "luck".
 - Many times we might just as well decide what to do by flipping a coin.



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Example of self-efficacy scale (Bandura, 2006)

Question: The attached form lists different activities. Rate how confident you are that you can do them as of now. Rate your degrees of confidence by recording a number from 0 to 100 using the scale given below:

0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Cannot do at all				Moderately certain can do						Highly certain can do

Examples activities:

1. Stand up for myself when I feel I am being treated unfairly
2. Keep tough problems from getting you down
3. Find community resources and make good use of them for the family



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World Values Survey

“Some people feel they have completely free choice and control over their lives, while other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them. Using the following scale where 1 means you have no freedom of choice and control at all and 10 means you have a great deal of freedom of choice and control, please indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out.”



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Demographic and Health Surveys

The DHS asks married women aged 15-49 on their decision-making roles (“who usually makes decisions about [X]”) across the following areas:

- (1) using/not using contraception
- (2) how the money you earn will be used
- (3) how your (husband's/partner's) earnings will be used
- (4) health care for respondent
- (5) major household purchases
- (6) visits to respondent's family or relatives



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WEAI

Decision-making questions on agriculture, borrowing, and productive assets:

- (1) For different agricultural activities (Food crop farming, cash crop farming, livestock, nonfarm economic activities, wage and salary employment, fishing):
 - (a) Did you participate? (Y/N);
 - (b) How much input did you have for each agricultural activity (and separately, income generated from each activity)? (No input or input in few decisions, input into some decisions, input into most or all decisions, or no decision made)

- (2) For different household decisions over agriculture, other nonfarm employment, expenditures and family planning:
 - (a) who is it that normally takes the decision (see Appendix A for more detail),
 - (b) to what extent do you feel like you can make your own personal decisions regarding these aspects of household life if you want(ed) to (not at all, small extent, medium extent, to a high extent)?



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So how do these measures stand up to our criteria?

⦿ Observable?

⦿ Relevant?

⦿ Actionable?



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So how do these measures stand up to our criteria?

🏠 Observable?

Household, individual surveys

🏠 Relevant?

🏠 Actionable?



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So how do these measures stand up to our criteria?

⊞ Observable?

Household, individual surveys

⊞ Relevant?

Linked to agency via theory (psychology, economics)

⊞ Actionable?



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So how do these measures stand up to our criteria?

🏠 Observable?

Household, individual surveys

🏠 Relevant?

Linked to agency via theory (psychology, economics)

🏠 Actionable?

Interventions can target items to reasonable extent



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Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

- ⊞ Designed by International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)
- ⊞ Origin: M&E tool for USAID “Feed the Future”
- ⊞ Goal – to track changes to WEE in agriculture projects
- ⊞ Multiple decomposable sub-indices, multidimensional
- ⊞ Requires explicit definitions, thresholds, and weights
- ⊞ Very long questionnaire



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Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

Table 2.1—The domains, indicators, and weights in the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

Domain	Indicator	Weight
Production	Input in productive decisions	1/10
	Autonomy in production	1/10
Resources	Ownership of assets	1/15
	Purchase, sale, or transfer of assets	1/15
	Access to and decisions about credit	1/15
Income	Control over use of income	1/5
Leadership	Group member	1/10
	Speaking in public	1/10
Time	Workload	1/10
	Leisure	1/10

Source: Authors' creation.



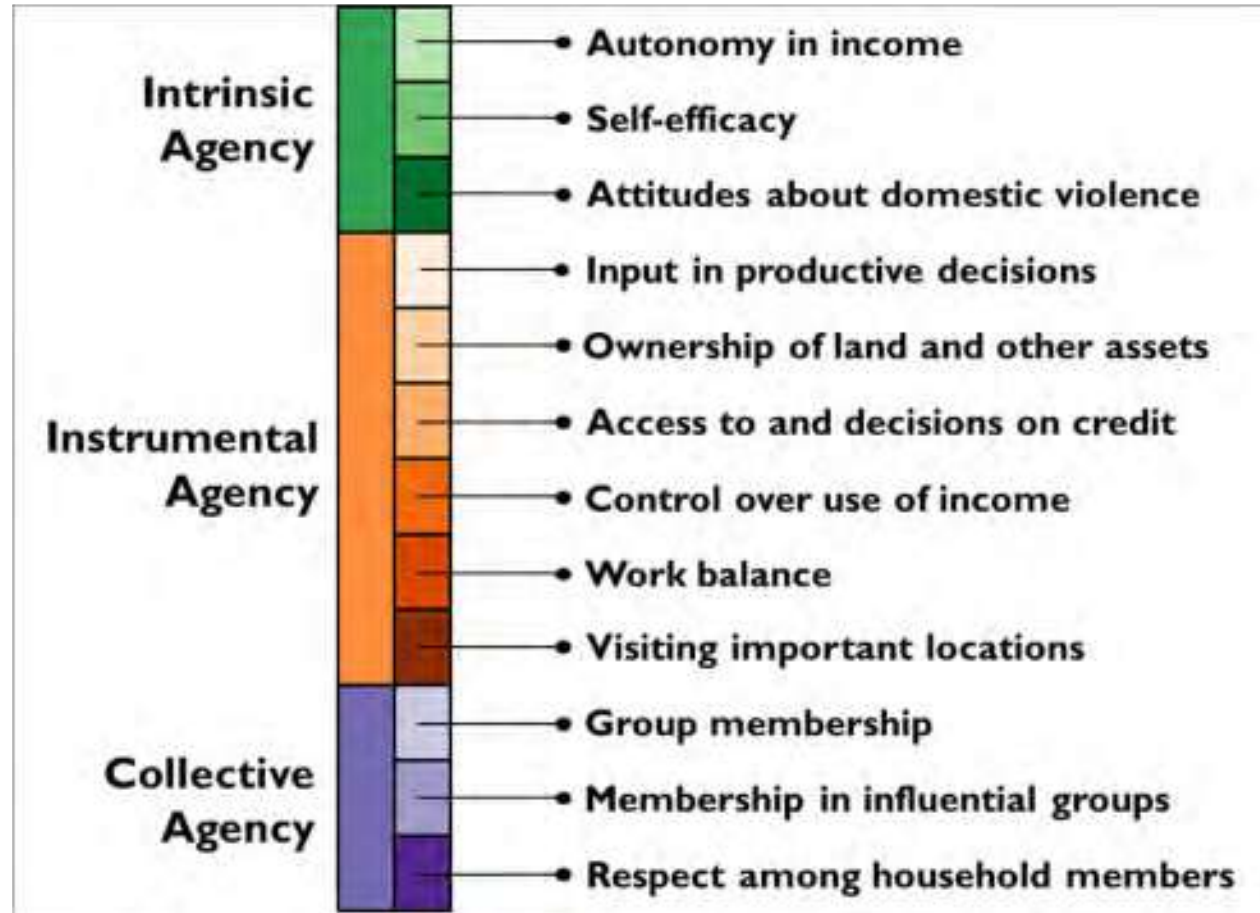
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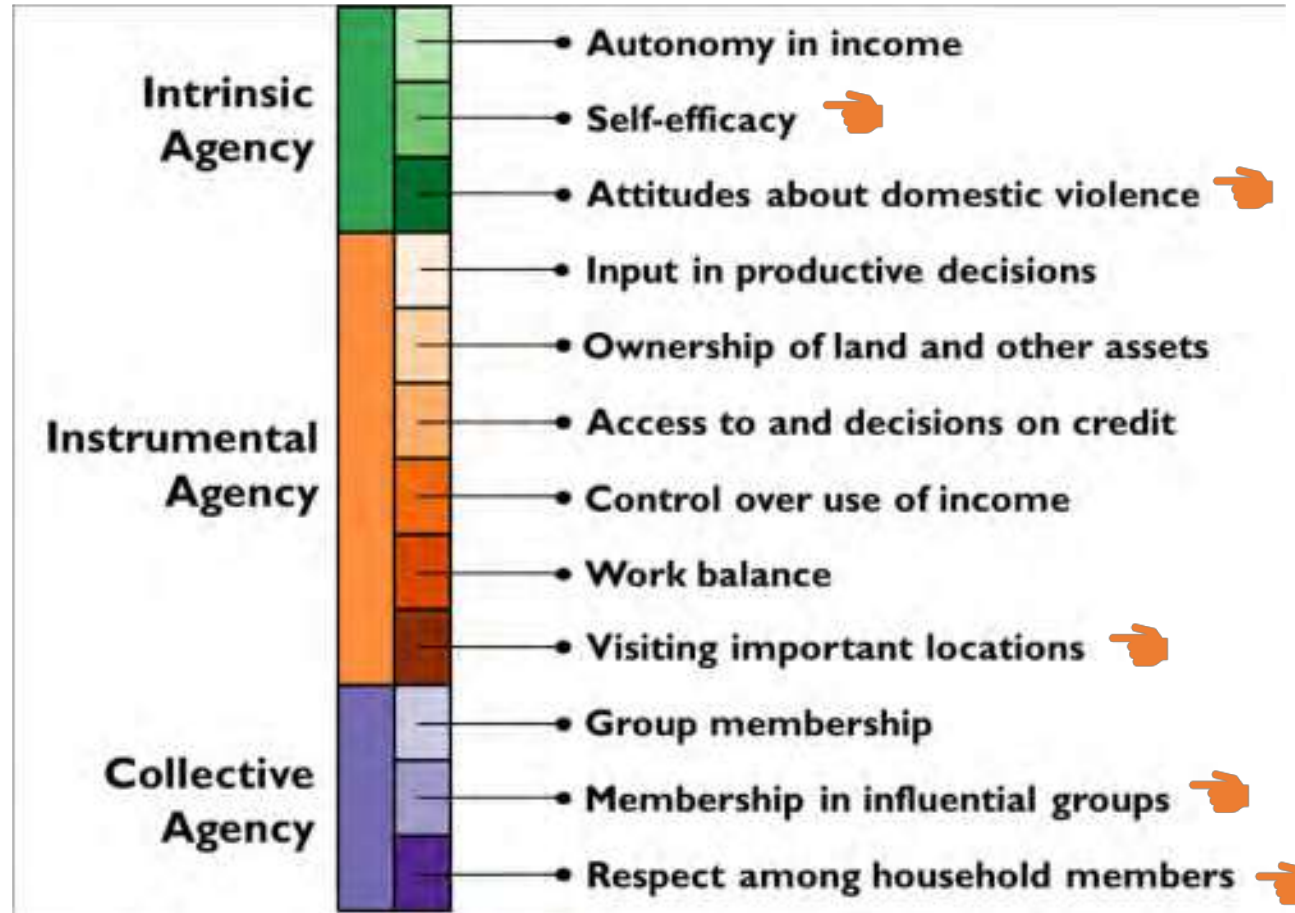
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Implementation Considerations

Local context matters

- ⊞ How to translate measures for local use?
- ⊞ Language – small “l” and large “L”?
- ⊞ Trade off between adapting for context (feasibility) and comparability



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Another example

DHS decision making:

- 🔗 Multiple domains
- 🔗 Can look at each measure independently
- 🔗 Relatively easy to administer
- 🔗 Can convert into an index
 - ☆ How do you weight?
 - ☆ Which components do you include?

919	Who usually decides how the money you earn will be used: you, your (husband/partner), or you and your (husband/partner) jointly?	RESPONDENT 1 HUSBAND/PARTNER 2 RESPONDENT AND HUSBAND/PARTNER JOINTLY 3 OTHER _____ 6 (SPECIFY)	
920	Would you say that the money that you earn is more than what your (husband/partner) earns, less than what he earns, or about the same?	MORE THAN HIM 1 LESS THAN HIM 2 ABOUT THE SAME 3 HUSBAND/PARTNER HAS NO EARNINGS 4 DON'T KNOW 8	→ 922
921	Who usually decides how your (husband's/partner's) earnings will be used: you, your (husband/partner), or you and your (husband/partner) jointly?	RESPONDENT 1 HUSBAND/PARTNER 2 RESPONDENT AND HUSBAND/PARTNER JOINTLY 3 HUSBAND/PARTNER HAS NO EARNINGS 4 OTHER _____ 6 (SPECIFY)	
922	Who usually makes decisions about health care for yourself: you, your (husband/partner), you and your (husband/partner) jointly, or someone else?	RESPONDENT 1 HUSBAND/PARTNER 2 RESPONDENT AND HUSBAND/PARTNER JOINTLY 3 SOMEONE ELSE 4 OTHER 6	



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Another example

DHS type of questions on decision-making

- ⊞ Large differences across cultures
 - ☆ Latin America **Supermadres** (Chaney, 1979; Folbre, 1994; Martinez-Restrepo et al 2017)
- ⊞ Preferences?
 - ☆ e.g. who decides on [health/education/purchases/meals]
- ⊞ Differences if you ask women or men (Donald et al. 2017)
- ⊞ Correlations across domains?



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Another example

WEE, household bargaining and contraceptive choice

🏠 Ashraf et al. (2014) study in Zambia

- ☆ Voucher for contraceptives; randomized if offered to women alone or in presence of spouse
- ☆ Evidence that women more likely to chose concealable forms if spousal discordance and if offered to woman alone
- ☆ Study says a lot about empowerment, *without measuring it!*



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Another example

WEE, household bargaining and contraceptive choice

🏠 Laszlo et al. (2019) study of Conditional Cash Transfers in Peru

★ Peru's CCT (Juntos) → increased use of modern contraceptives

★ Also find evidence of concealing use

★ CCT more likely to lead to *concealed use* if husbands want more kids

★ effect disappears when using DHS measures of decision-making (e.g. who decides on birth control)



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What do these examples tell us?

- ⊞ How you **frame** the question matters
- ⊞ Framing may vary based on **context** (language, culture, domain)
- ⊞ **How you ask** the question matters (who else is in the room?)
- ⊞ Empirical results **may not be robust** to measurement indicator



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Achievements

Defined as “outcomes” and “well-being outcomes” but important caveat:

“We are interested in possible inequalities in people's capacity to make choices rather than in differences in the choices they make.”



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Recall

Theory of change:

- Why do you think she isn't working?
- How would the the intervention solve this?
- How is the outcome (work) related to empowerment?





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Recall

Tailor the metric to the theory of change:

- Research: Look for existing measures
- Development: Adapt for local context
- Prototype: Pre-test, test, re-test, validate





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Example

Clark et al. (2018)

- ⦿ **Theory:** lack of child care barrier to employment
- ⦿ **Intervention:** Child Care subsidy RCT
- ⦿ **Measures:** Labour market outcomes; autonomy
- ⦿ **Results:** Huge results re employment, not much action on autonomy measures



Photo: IDRC/Tommy Trenchard

Can Subsidized Early Child Care Promote Women's Employment? Evidence from Kenya.

KEY RESULTS

- Mothers were eager to send their children to early child care centers.
- Mothers who received subsidized child care were 17% more likely to be employed than mothers who did not.
- Working mothers who received subsidized child care were able to work on average five fewer hours per week than those who did not, without any loss to their earnings.
- Subsidizing child care helped mothers to both find and maintain employment.
- Cost, more so than concerns over quality,



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Moving beyond survey questions

Behavioural economics (J-PAL, 2018)

- ⊞ Incentivized games
- ⊞ Example: experiment on control over resources) (Schaner, 2017)
- ⊞ How to split \$ between husband & Wife
 - ☆ A: Private division +
 - ☆ B: Joint division +
 - ☆ C: Random division
- ⊞ The larger the wedge between A and B
→ the lower her bargaining power





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Where do we go from here?



J-PAL (2018)

BOX 1. DEVELOPING A MEASUREMENT STRATEGY

Step 1. Conduct formative research to understand gender and empowerment in the specific context

Step 2. Map a theory of change and use it to select appropriate outcomes and indicators

Step 3. Develop and validate data collection instruments that minimize reporting bias

Step 4. Design a data collection plan that minimizes measurement error



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Where do we go from here?

- ⊗ Theory of change?
- ⊗ What is your purpose for measurement?
- ⊗ What is your research question / intervention?
- ⊗ Build-in measurement strategy from the very start
- ⊗ What lessons to take?
- ⊗ No one-shoe fits-all



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Where do we go from here?

- ⊗ Asking the right question
- ⊗ What is the underlying theory?
- ⊗ Tailoring the metric to the problem at hand vs. generalizability
- ⊗ Observable? Relevant? Actionable?
- ⊗ Pre-test, test and re-test
- ⊗ Feasibility of the measure (local context Theory of change?)



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