Conceptualizing, Operationalizing and Measuring Women's Empowerment

Jemimah Njuki

CARE USA

Understanding Empowerment

Empowerment Defined…

- Empowerment: The process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability (Kabeer, 1999, 2002)

- Two important aspects of empowerment:
  - Process: The process towards gender equality or greater freedom of choice and action is as important as the change itself
  - Agency: Women themselves must be significant actors of the process of change

Spheres of Empowerment: The CARE Women Empowerment Framework
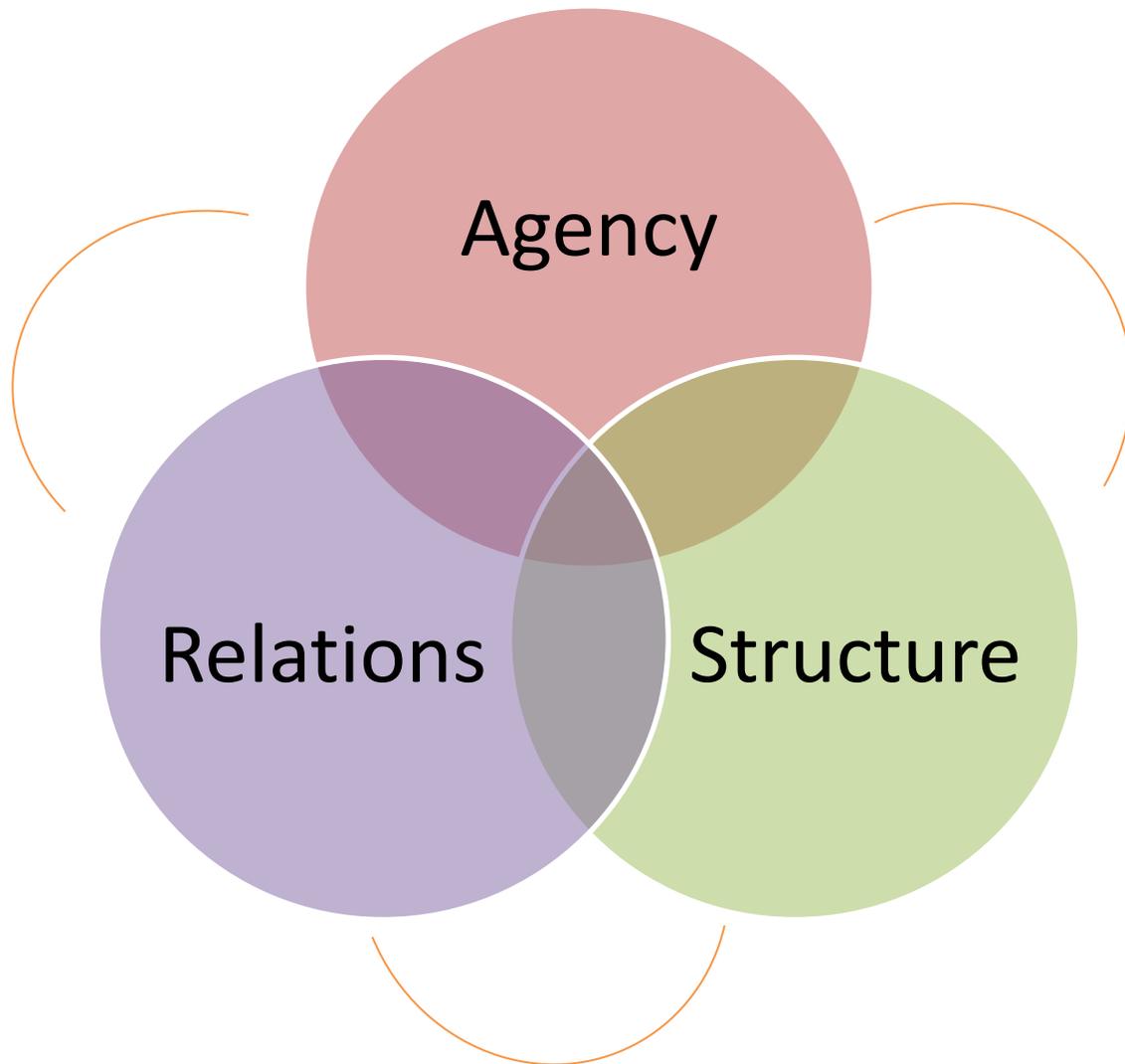
EMPOWERMENT is the sum total of changes needed for an individual to realize their full human rights – the interplay of changes in:

AGENCY
- Own aspirations and capabilities, ability to have control over resources and decisions, self efficacy
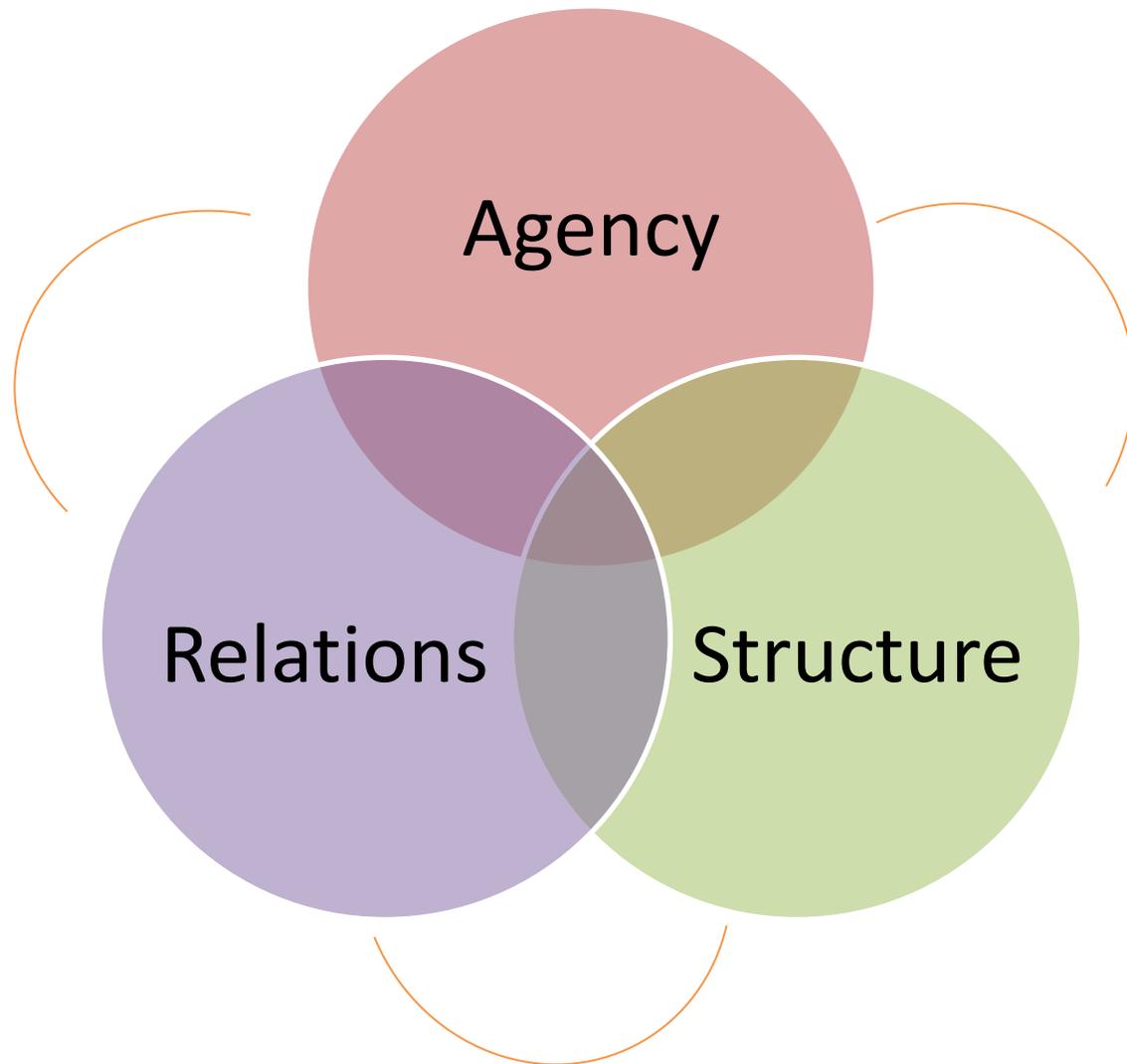
STRUCTURE
- The environment that surrounds and conditions choices (legal, political, institutional, representational…)

RELATIONS
- The power relations through which she negotiates her path (household, community, national etc)

Spheres of Empowerment: CARE's Empowerment Framework

Scope of Empowerment
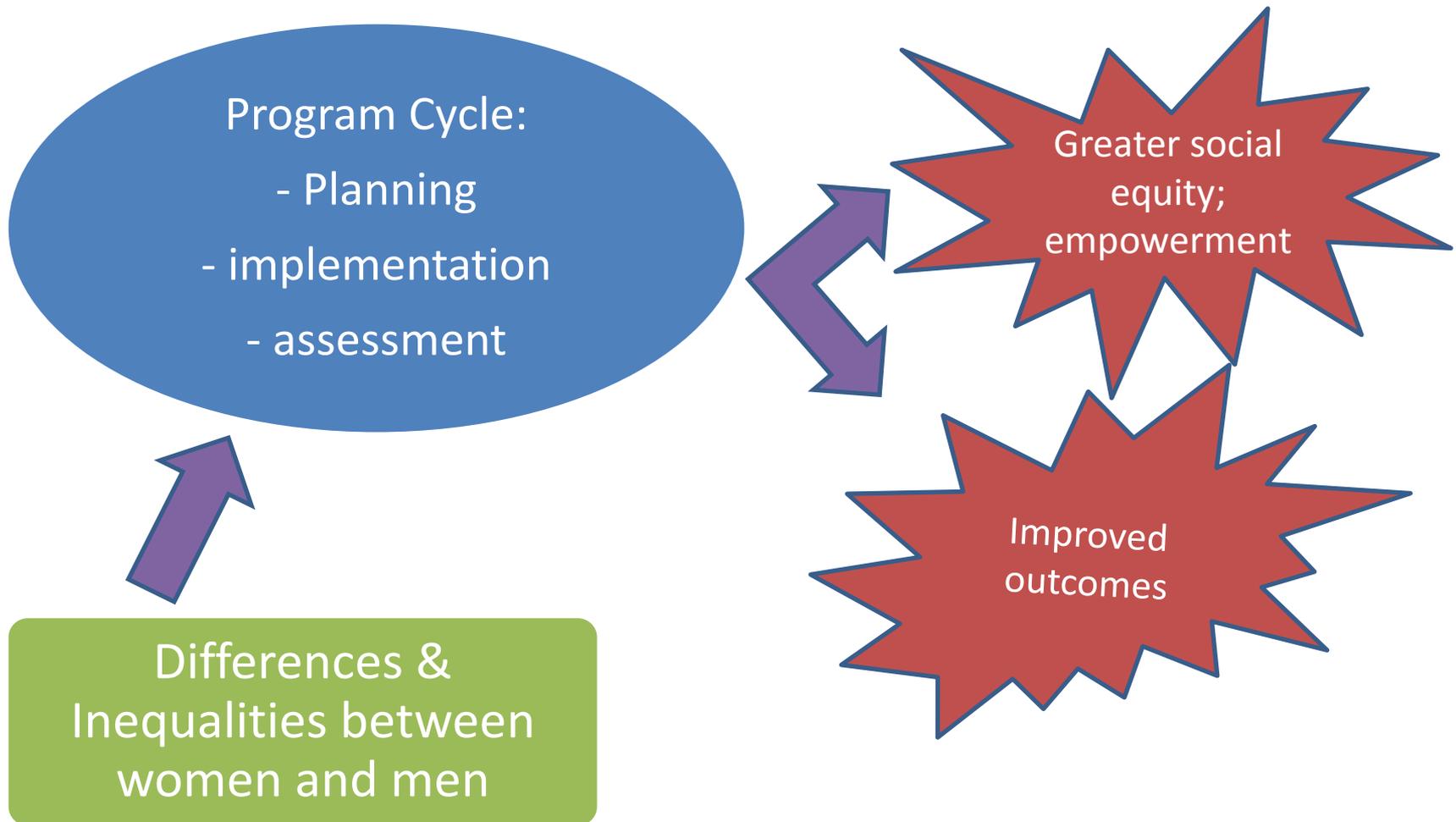
Economic

Social /Cultural

Political

Legal

Psychological

A holistic view to empowerment and gender equality

- It should not be assumed that because an intervention promotes women's empowerment along a particular dimension, empowerment in other dimensions will necessarily follow;
  - Economic empowerment does not necessarily lead to social, cultural, legal or psychological empowerment
- There is need to look at multiple dimensions, but also different levels of dimensions;
  - Empowerment of women at the individual level, or agency is a necessary but not sufficient condition for changes at the community, institutional or national levels
- Working at Agency, without focusing on Relations and Structures will not achieve broad empowerment for women
  - Training women is a necessary but not sufficient condition for their empowerment
  - On the other hand, having the legal mechanisms in place without increasing women's agency to take advantage of these does not lead to empowerment

# Operationalizing empowerment and gender equality in our work

Integrating Gender and Empowerment in our Work

Program Cycle:
- Planning
- implementation
- assessment

Greater social equity; empowerment

Improved outcomes

Differences & Inequalities between women and men

It starts with a Gender Analysis and….

A systematic attempt to identify key issues contributing to gender inequalities and poverty
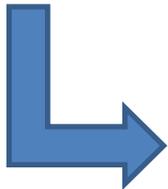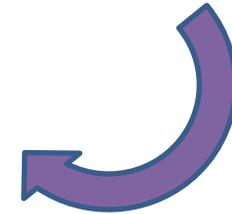
to analyze these, staff, partners and communities collect, identify, examine and analyze information about gender barriers that contribute to poverty – including how the realities, expectations, rights and choices for women differ from men

Gender Analysis in program design

How will gender relations affect the achievement of sustainable results?

How will proposed results affect the relative status of men and women?

Gender Analysis in a Program Cycle

Build evidence, advocate

Design, innovate, adapt

Monitor change

Assess, monitor impact
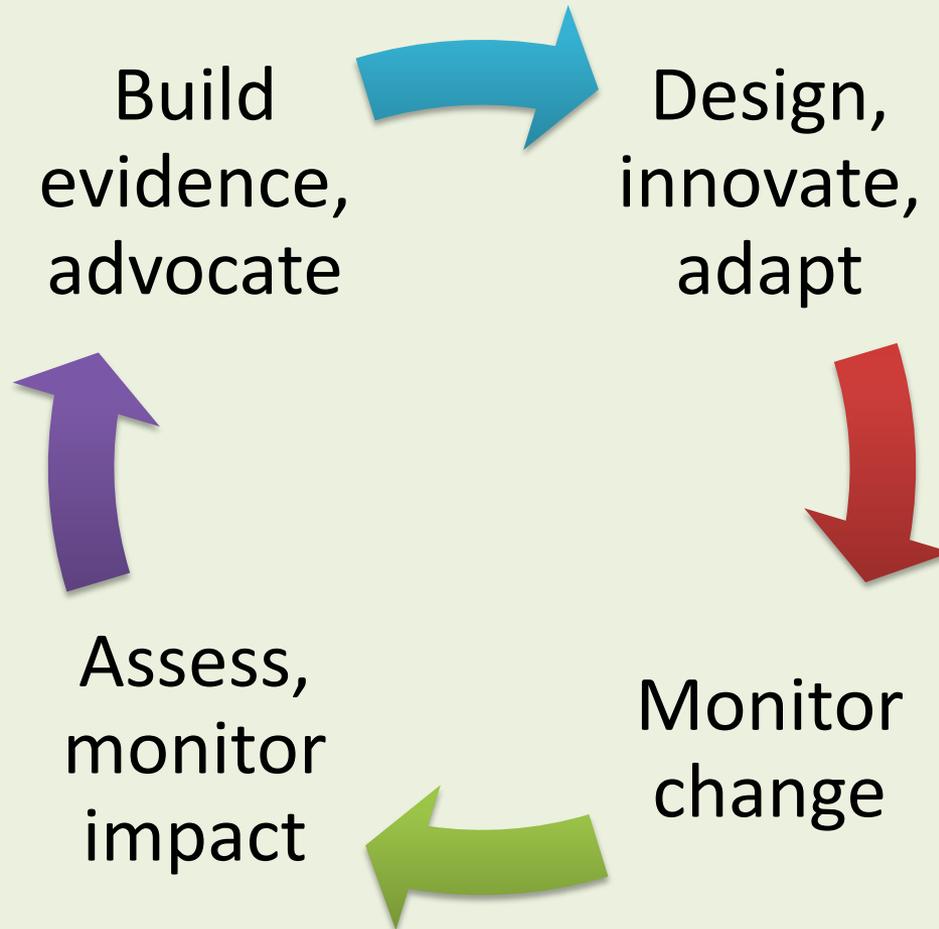
Gender and Context

Gender constraints and opportunities need to be understood in specific contexts, as they vary over time and across…

Social Relationships
- Partnership
- Households
- Communities
- Civil society and government organizations and institutions

Socio-cultural contexts
- Ethnicity
- Class
- Race
- Religion
- Age

Good Practices Framework

C. STRATEGIC ISSUES, PRACTICAL NEEDS

B. CORE AREAS OF INQUIRY

1. Sexual / Gendered Division of Labour
2. Household Decision-making
3. Control over Productive Assets
4. Access to Public Spaces and Services
5. Claiming Rights & Meaningful Participation in Public Decision-making
6. Control over One's Body
7. Violence & Restorative Justice
8. Aspirations for Oneself

A. PRELIMINARY FOUNDATIONS – BROADER CONTEXT

1. Sexual division of labor
- Within private and public spheres; informal and formal work
- Norms influence who is allowed to do what

2. Household decision-making
- About sexual relations, family planning, purchases, work, food allocation

3. Control over productive assets
- Who controls what assets - gained from livelihoods, major & minor assets, inheritance, property, financial capital

4. Access to public spaces

- Mobility, access to services that are inclusive and accountable (financial, health, education, justice systems)

5. Rights & Meaningful political participation

- Knowing rights & claiming w/o backlash
- Voice is heard

6. Control over one's body

- Body & sexuality; free from neglect and abuse

7. Violence & Restorative Justice

- Physical, psychological, abuse, neglect
- Self-directed, interpersonal, institutional

8. Aspirations & Strategic Interests

- What do individuals strive towards? What are their goals, interests, aspirations?

Gender Integration Continuum

Gender Aware

Exploitative — Accommodating — Transformative

Gender Blind
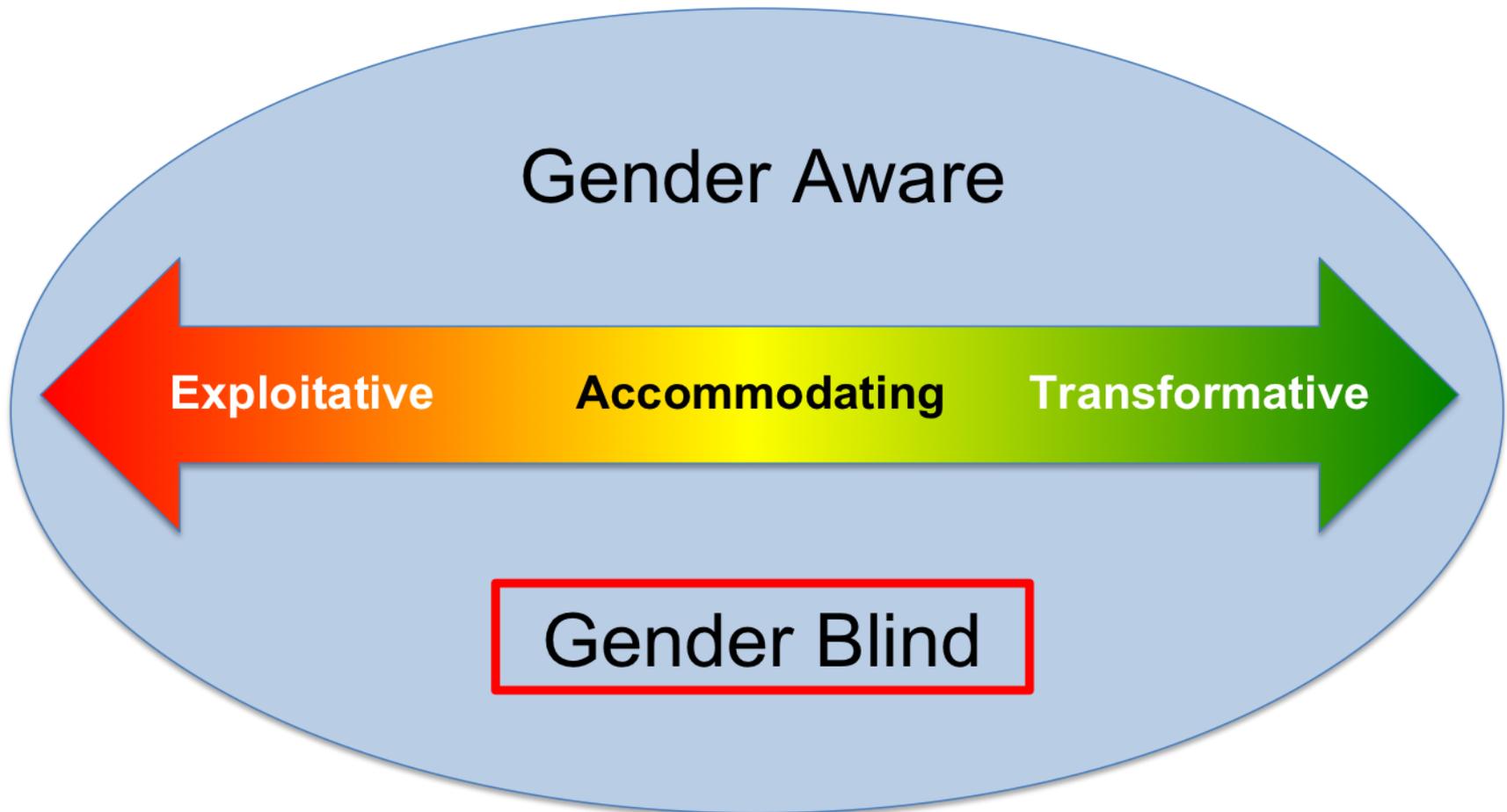
Gender Exploitative	• Approaches take advantage of rigid gender norms and existing imbalances in power to achieve program objectives
Gender Accommodating	• Approaches acknowledge the role of gender norms and inequities and seek to develop actions that adjust to and often compensate for them.
Gender Transformative	• Approaches actively strive to examine, question, and change rigid gender norms and imbalance of power as a means of reaching outcomes as well as gender equity objectives

Gender exploitative, accommodating or transformative?

Handwashing for Diarrheal Disease Prevention

A large initiative aimed to reduce morbidity and mortality among children under five through a communication campaign promoting handwashing with soap. Mass media (TV, radio, posters) depicted a mother as a caretaker of the family and illustrated critical times for handwashing before cooking or preparing food; before feeding a child or eating; and cleaning up after a baby.   *adapted from IGWG training module

Gender exploitative, accommodating or transformative?

Agricultural production yields

In an agricultural project, staff conduct a gender analysis and learn that men tend to raise cows and women raise chickens. Though cows are higher value producers than, women traditionally do not own or raise cows. Staff recognize these gender differences and plan to separate producer groups for men and women – one for men (with cows) and a separate one with women (on chickens)

Gender exploitative, accommodating or transformative?

In village savings and loans groups, staff observe that men are more literate and acknowledged as leaders more so than women. The staff work with men and women to understand why this is so, and in doing so, identify skills to increase women's agency and leadership, hold community dialogues (with men & women) that challenge assumptions that women cannot be leaders.

Engagement of Men and Boys for Women's Empowerment

- Important role for men and boys women's empowerment and achieving gender equality (Men as part of the solution)
  - Changing household gender relations
  - Reducing gender based violence
  - Equitable household decision making
  - Equity access to and control over household and other productive assets and resources
  - Household division of labour (including care work)
  - Men as agents /champions of change

- Approach to gender equality and women's empowerment as beneficial for households, communities, nations

Measuring Empowerment

Key Issues in Measuring Empowerment

- Multidimensional nature of empowerment
  - Not one single measure
  - Social, economic, political, physiological—men and women can be unequal to various degrees in each of these dimensions
- Operationalizing the concept at various levels of aggregation and different contexts: Different definitions across disciplines
  - Micro: the individual, household, family
  - Meso: community, organizations
  - Macro: Policy
- Difficulties inherent in measuring process
  - Evolving
  - Data at different points often unavailable
- Strategic life choices-infrequency of their occurrence
  - Decisions that affect a person's life trajectory (Kabeer's definition of empowerment)
  - The relationship between small choices /decisions vs big choices and decisions
- Short /Long term nature of empowerment

Measuring Empowerment

- Traditionally has been done with single variables as proxies
  - Education, Income under management of women, knowledge, health
  - A single indicator is usually insufficient even to measure a single dimension of empowerment
  - Additional indicators and relational analysis often needed to test whether the indicator actually is a reflection of empowerment

Measuring Empowerment: Framework of dimensions and indicators of Women's Empowerment

Dimension	Household /Individual	Community	Broader Arenas
Economic	Control over income, ownership of assets, relative contribution to family support, access to and control of family resources	Access to employment, access to credit, involvement and representation in local associations, access to markets	Representation in high paying jobs, number of women CEOs, representation of women's economic interests in macroeconomic policies and budgets
Social / Cultural	Freedom of movement, lack of discrimination against women and girls, education of girls, participation in domestic decision making, control over sexual relations, contraception, time of marriage, spouse selection, freedom from violence	Access to and visibility in social spaces, social networks, shift in patriarchal norms, greater value and autonomy for women, local campaigns against domestic violence	Literacy and greater access to a broad range of education options, positive media images of women, regional and national trends favoring women in things like age of marriage, political, legal and religious support for such shifts, health systems providing easy access to contraception, reproductive health services
Legal	Knowledge of legal rights and mechanisms, familial support for exercising rights	Community mobilization for rights, campaigns for rights awareness, access to legal mechanisms, effective local	Laws supporting women's rights, access to resources and options, advocacy for rights and legislation, use of judicial system for

Measuring Empowerment: Framework……

Dimension	Individual/ Household	Community	Broad Arenas
Political	Knowledge of political system and means to access it, familial support for political engagement, ability to exercise right to vote	Involvement or mobilization in political systems /campaigns, support for specific candidates /legislation, representation in local government	Representation in regional and local government, strength as a voting bloc, representation of women interests in effective lobbies and interest groups
Psychological	Self esteem, self efficacy, psychological well-being	Collective awareness of injustice, potential for mobilization	Collective expression of inclusion and entitlement, systemic acceptance of women's entitlement and inclusion

The Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index

- The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) measures the empowerment, agency, and inclusion of women in the agriculture sector

- The WEAI was developed by the International Food Policy Research Institute, and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative to track the change in women's empowerment levels for Feed the Future

- It measures the roles and extent of women's engagement in five domains

- It also measures women's empowerment relative to men within their households (GPI).
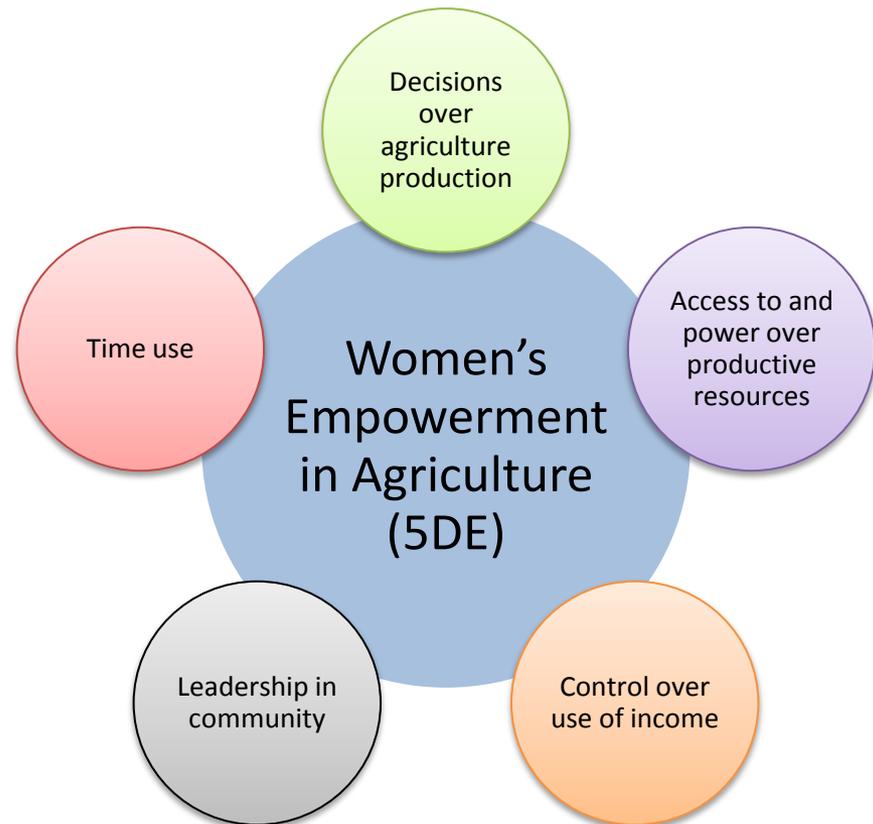
Adapting the WEAI

- The WEAI is constructed using the Alkire Foster Method developed for measuring multidimensional poverty, well-being, and inequality, it measures outcomes at the individual level (person or household) against multiple criteria (domains and/or dimensions and indicators).

- ILRI Adaptation to include rights and women's health and testing with three case studies

- CARE adaptation to include mobility, political participation, Women's aspirations, changes in gender relations across six countries

In Conclusion

- Development programs especially those in agriculture have focused a lot on women's agency as women's empowerment
  - Need to look at other core spheres of empowerment- Structures and Relations
  - Expand gender integration into programs through appropriate partnerships
- While there are inherent difficulties in measuring women's empowerment;
  - The WEAI index provides a tool that can be used to measure women's empowerment in the context of agriculture
  - The index can be adapted to include other domains of interest and different levels of empowerment

"what gets measured, gets done"