



Understanding and Measuring Women's Psychosocial Agency Guidance Note

Impact Area: All

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Why Do We Need to Measure Women's Psychosocial Agency?

Comprehensive gender data related to agency are crucial for tracking progress in promoting gender equality, yet reliable measurements are still a challenge and are understudied. Existing measures, such as measuring self-efficacy or control over assets alone, do not fully capture the diverse nature of women's agency, including understanding the transformative processes that take place in agency building.

Understanding the nuanced challenges that women face in exercising agency is crucial for designing effective interventions and policies that empower women to realize their full potential and participate more equitably in society. Social norms often dictate traditional gender roles, placing a greater burden of caregiving and domestic responsibilities on women. This unequal distribution of responsibilities can limit women's time, energy, and freedom to pursue their own goals and aspirations. Moreover, patriarchal structures within institutions further exacerbate disparities in agency. For example, limited access to resources like land and financial capital can restrict women's economic independence and decision-making power. Additionally, gender-based violence, whether physical, emotional, or economic, creates a climate of fear and insecurity that can severely constrain women's ability to assert their agency and make autonomous choices. As a result of these systemic barriers, women's agency is often constrained or constrained in ways that differ from men. When opportunities for improvement arise in their lives, such as access to education, employment, or leadership roles, women may not always recognize or seize these opportunities due to their circumstances. They may internalize societal expectations and gendered norms, doubting their own abilities or feeling obligated to prioritize familial or societal expectations over their own aspirations.

To be able to understand the progress of our programming on agency as a gender equality outcome, we need reliable and validated indicators and measures that incorporate the complex challenges that women face in building their agency. The Women's Psychosocial Agency Framework is a comprehensive approach to measuring agency that can be applied across programming.

What is Women's Psychosocial Agency?

Women's Psychosocial Agency (WOPSA) is a process through which women feel, think, and relate as capable and entitled individuals who are free to pursue their own well-being in life within their given environment, which includes being aware of both obstacles they face and resources they have. It is referred to as psychosocial because it covers both psychological and sociological considerations, meaning that the agency process takes place individually and internally, but each person lives in a specific environment that influences the obstacles they face and resources they have available.

As agency is a process that happens internally at the individual level, it cannot be directly measured. The WOPSA framework is comprised of three dimensions and their respective factors to be able to obtain valid and reliable measures of psychosocial agency.

The **Emotional Dimension** is comprised of feelings and assessments one has about oneself, and perceptions of effectiveness in controlling one's own capabilities. It is made up of three factors:

- **Self-efficacy:** Assessment of the ability to successfully carry out tasks and objectives.
- **Self-esteem:** Assessment of personal skills and general worth.
- **Time control satisfaction:** Perception of the ability to manage time demands in your daily life and feel satisfied with that management.

The **Cognitive Dimension** refers to the ability to establish one's own objectives and awareness of obstacles and resources in oneself and their environment. It has two factors:

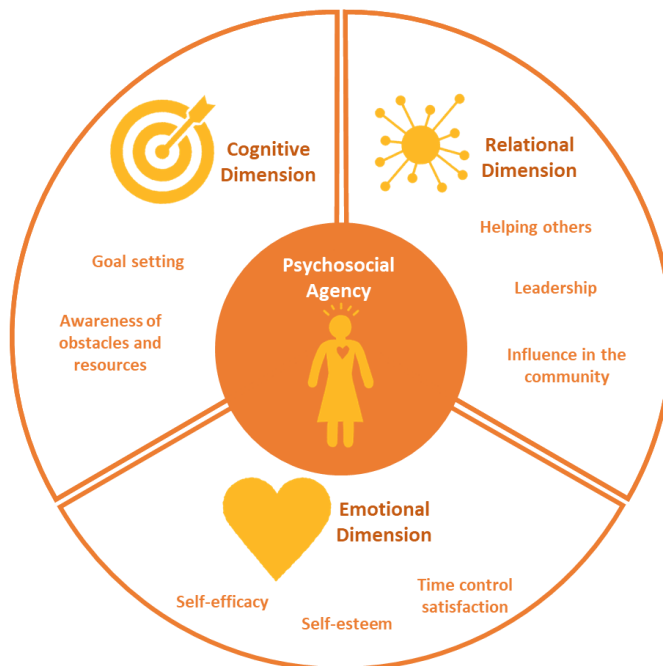
- **Goal setting:** Perception of people's ability to make decisions to achieve significant goals and visualization of the strategies to take to achieve those goals.
- **Awareness of obstacles and resources:** Perception of the ability to identify and understand both the obstacles that can impede the achievement of goals and the available resources that can help overcome these obstacles.

The **Relational Dimension** is made up of attitudes and perceptions about one's ability to help others and be useful in the community. It includes three factors:

- **Helping others:** Perception of the ability to be helpful to others.
- **Leadership:** Perception of the ability to influence or guide the actions of other people towards shared and/or own goals.
- **Influence in the community:** Perception of the ability to contribute significantly to the well-being and development of the community.

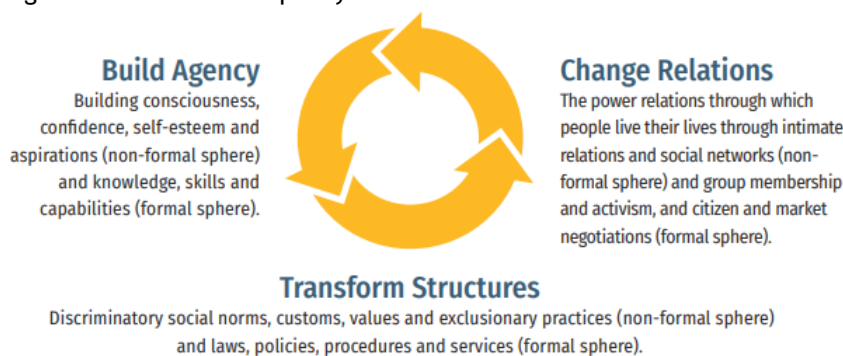
Agency is not static. In transformative agency building processes, individuals experience through what are referred to as **subjective processes**: the internal and personal experiences, such as thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes, that a person lives through at a specific time and context. By identifying these processes, we can begin to understand whether and which social norms, values, and beliefs are internalized and shifted. In this framework, we focus on subjective processes related to agency, and its three subdimensions, namely emotional, relational, and cognitive agency. For example, subjective processes for each dimension could include:

- **Emotional dimension:** Accepting, respecting, and valuing oneself as a woman
- **Cognitive dimension:** Recognizing oneself as entitled to rights
- **Relational dimension:** Feeling part of a community where one is useful and receives help



How does Women's Psychosocial Agency fit into CARE's Gender Equality Framework?

Women's Psychosocial Agency can be understood as a comprehensive measure for the non-formal sphere of agency building in the CARE Gender Equality Framework.



What tools are available to measure and assess Women's Psychosocial Agency?

The WOPSA Framework provides a mixed-method approach, meaning including both quantitative and qualitative measurement and assessment tools. Some of the current tools have been contextualized for projects focused on the impact areas of Women's Economic Justice and Ending Gender-based Violence, and geographically contextualized to Guatemala, however the tools can be easily contextualized to other types of programming and geographies. Women's Psychosocial Agency can be measured and assessed with the following toolkit of approaches.

WOPSA Questionnaire

The WOPSA questionnaire was designed to measure women's psychosocial agency. Measuring women's psychosocial agency means we are trying to understand a latent construct: a theoretical concept that cannot be measured directly and so is measured through a group of measurable indicators that can be directly observed. This measurement tool was empirically validated using statistical techniques based on a sample of 512 participants in Guatemala.

The questionnaire is comprised of one main module and two supplementary modules. These can be combined with existing surveys or questionnaires, or can be used on their own. The main module is the measurement scale for psychosocial agency which has 19 questions and takes an estimated 10 minutes to complete. The first supplementary module covers well-being, personal goals, and uses of time and takes 15 minutes to complete. The second supplementary module focuses on gender-based violence and takes 5 minutes to complete.

The result of the main module of questionnaire is an indicator that is on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest level of psychosocial agency. From this indicator we can report the number (#) and percentage (%) of women and girls that report high levels of psychosocial agency, along with disaggregated analyses on differences. The supplementary modules are a combination of quantitative and qualitative responses that provide important information on the lived experiences and contextual factors of the participants.

In-depth Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions are qualitative, open-ended, discovery-oriented methods to learn detailed information about a topic from key stakeholders. With in-depth interviews, the goal is to explore the interviewee's point of view, experiences, feeling, and perspectives. With focus group discussions, a moderator conducts a group interview with 10 to 15 participants. The focus group serves as a platform for women to share their diverse experiences, perspectives, and challenges.

Through both methods, we can identify what aspects are important to the participants in achieving dignified livelihoods, personal goals, and comprehensive well-being and to understand why these aspects hold significance to them. By delving into the reasons behind their priorities, we can gain a deeper understanding of the values, motivations, and subjective factors that shape their aspirations and decision-making processes. This holistic approach allows us to address the psychological root that may hinder their ability to exercise economic rights effectively. Through open and inclusive conversations, either individually or in groups, we can uncover the complexity of women's lived realities and explore the intersecting social, economic, and cultural factors that influence their opportunities and choices.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a qualitative research method that involves immersing oneself in the natural environment of the project participants, actively participating in their activities, and making detailed observations. The primary purpose of employing participant observation is to gain a deep and holistic understanding of the social and cultural context under investigation. Through this we aim to go beyond superficial observations and collect rich, contextual data by actively engaging with the participants. This method is particularly valuable in settings where the complexities of human behaviour, social dynamics, and cultural nuances are of interest.

By actively participating in the activities and interventions, we can obtain first-hand insights into the daily lives, behaviours, and interactions of the participants. This immersive approach allows for the capture of context-specific information that may not be easily accessible through surveys or interviews alone. Through participant observation, we can uncover hidden patterns, social norms, and implicit cultural practices that might influence the participants' behaviour. Overall, participant observation provides a unique and valuable means of exploring complex processes, such as agency, within their natural context, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of women.

How can I use it?

As an indicator or measurement tool in a program

This framework and its measurement tools can be used across impact areas when the goal is to understand agency building in the non-formal sphere and provides a validated measurement tool to compare across programs. The questionnaire can be added to existing surveys or questionnaires already being used for base, mid, and endline surveys, as well as for a one-time data collection tool.

As part of program design

The WOPSA framework and tools can be used in program design activities such as needs assessments to understand the target group's needs and challenges, and design interventions accordingly.

As a comparative tool across programs and portfolios

When comparing across programs and portfolios in different contexts, the lack of standard measures makes it difficult to understand how interventions are impacting program participants. The WOPSA scale and tools can facilitate a comparison point to better determine program quality and effectiveness.

Lessons learned and Implications

The WOPSA framework looks at agency as a comprehensive concept that includes measures of well-being. Using this tool, we can better and more fully understand the extent to which levels of well-being are improved or impacted through our programming.

The Women's Psychosocial Agency Framework is a Gender Transformative MEAL approach because it:

- Places gender at the centre and is built on feminist theories and approaches.
- Centres the voices of those we work with in all of their diversity by including the subjective processes that they are experiencing in their agency building processes.
- Prioritizes rights, aspirations, and knowledge.

Acknowledgements

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