

## EMERGE LEARNINGS REPORT FINDINGS FROM WORKSHOP AND SCOPING MEETINGS ON QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENT OF GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA MARCH 2017

### BACKGROUND

Growing interest and investments in gender equality and empowerment to improve global health and development are weighted by lagging science around the quantitative measurement needed for valid population level estimates and program evaluation outcomes. UN Women reports that 80% of indicators for Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality and Empowering All Women and Girls have no corresponding quantitative measures. *For recognition and impact on gender equality and empowerment, we must have better data. Good data require good measures, the absence of which compromises the demonstrated value of this goal for key decision-makers.*

EMERGE [Evidence-based Measures of Empowerment for Research on Gender Equality] is a new project focused on measurement of gender equality and empowerment for development and health in India. The World Economic Forum's report on the Global Gender Gap documents notable improvement in India, with a 21 point jump in the country's ranking from 2015 to 2016, resulting in India overall being ranked 87 of 144 nations. However, the nation's rankings in terms of gender gaps in economic participation and health specifically are an abysmal 136 and 142, respectively. Simultaneously, the nation has substantial social capital with regard to scholars and government investments in data collection and monitoring of these issues, to facilitate use of data to create change.

To better understand how to advance the field of Gender Empowerment and Equality (GE/E) measurement in India, the EMERGE research team at the Center on Gender Equity and Health (GEH), UC San Diego, convened an interdisciplinary workshop and a series of meetings with India-based expert researchers in GE/E measurement, evaluation and monitoring.

### SCOPING METHODOLOGY

To understand the state of GE/E measurement and determine how measures assessing GE/E for health and development could be improved for India, GEH conducted an all-day workshop on February 28, 2017 and a series of one-on-one meetings between February 26 and March 5, 2017 in Delhi, with researchers from Indian academic institutions, research institutes, and grant making organizations. Researchers were from the fields of labor and development economics, demography, public health and psychology, and identified by GEH partners in India, and through a review of the literature on gender measurement in India. Meetings were supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).



L: Katherine Hay, Deputy Director at BMGF India opens the cross-disciplinary workshop on Feb. 28, 2017.

R: Amy Pennington, Program Officer at BMGF Seattle presents BMGF model on Women and Girls Empowerment. *Photo by Joe Hill/RoundRoomImage*

Our all day workshop on February, 28, 2017 was conducted with an interdisciplinary group of 25 researchers on gender and measurement to begin a cross-disciplinary conversation on how to define and understand gender equality and empowerment, best evidence measures of gender equality and empowerment across different dimensions of focus (e.g., reproductive health and autonomy, time use, women's labor participation, and violence), and gaps in measurement and our understanding of these issues. Panel presentations were offered by internationally recognized experts who focused on intimate partner violence (Dr. Anita Raj), gender role norms (Dr. Ravi Verma), time use (Dr. Indira Hirway), and labor force participation (Dr. Rohini Somanathan).

Discussions were, at times hampered by different terminology used across different disciplines of study, and even in terms of agreement regarding what constitutes a measure- whether it is the assessment tool or variable construction or both. Perspectives also differed regarding the importance of being pragmatic from the start and considering the difficulty or resource intensiveness of a measure prior to creation, or allowing for creation of measures that may be unwieldy but allow for greater innovations or precision and validity. Nonetheless, there was consensus on the need for improvement in gender equality and empowerment measurement, and the importance of cross-disciplinary work and more shared definitions of what we mean by measurement to achieve this goal.



L: GEH Director, Anita Raj, speaks about Intimate Partner Violence on an expert panel at the workshop.

R: Rohini Somanathan, Professor of Economics at the Delhi School of Economics, speaks on the panel about the Economic Empowerment of women. *Photos by Joe Hill/Round Room Image*

Subsequent to the panel, small group discussions were formed regarding how to create innovations in measurement and how to address gaps in the field across three key dimensions of focus: Time Use and Economic Empowerment, Health and Well-being, and Household and Intrafamilial Relationships inclusive of domestic violence. Summaries of discussions are as follows:

Time Use and Economic Empowerment. There is a need to develop measures of time-use that are efficient, and representative of the total time people can be expected to recall. Additionally, better research is needed in the investment, beyond time, individuals make in an activity, to look at subjective attitudes toward activities and the priorities for individual's times, and how that may vary by gender. Time-use measures should also include concepts of economic empowerment and understanding the extent of time spent on unpaid work and how that varies by gender.

Health and Well-Being. Experts discussed health outcome indicators including unintended pregnancy and gender differences in child mortality, immunization rates, and access to/use of health services. Experts identified such differentials as indicative of gender disempowerment and suggested that better measures to understand household decision making processes around health care for children is needed. Experts also noted need for measures to assess healthy transitions for adolescents into adulthood, and gendered pathways that lead to unequal access to health.

Household and Intrafamilial Relationships. Experts emphasized the need to develop household measures of gender equality and empowerment that are pragmatic and adaptable to particular contexts. Researchers noted that measures to assess soft-skills, self-esteem and aspirations have not been particularly successful, and that there is a need to develop reliable measures for those constructs that can work in the Indian context and with diverse groups. More research is needed to understand why and how these measures were not successful – whether it was a flaw in design, a flaw in implementation, or a lack of understanding of the context the measure was tested in. There should also be a push to move away from self-reported measures to get a more accurate assessment of aspects of empowerment, and to use novel and innovative methods of measurement and data collection. A challenge to identify practical, cost-effective and contextualized measures that can be used at a large scale was identified.

## **KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

*There was ample support and interest from researchers regarding the need for improvement in the measurement of gender inequalities and gender empowerment and their impact on health and development. However, priority issues and approaches varied among the group, often along the lines of discipline and type of institution.*

- Consensus regarding definitions of gender equality and empowerment were achieved by the multidisciplinary group with little debate. Participants also were in high agreement regarding the importance of contextual considerations in development of measures, given the diversity of India and the populations in which these issues would be relevant.
- Participants were, to some degree, siloed in their topics of interest and their definitions of measurement, with economists more likely to focus on time use and economic empowerment where demographers and public health researchers were more likely to focus on reproductive, maternal and child health. Cross-cutting areas for these groups were on themes of gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, sexual harassment and freedom of movement. Gender role norms were identified as an area of interest across disciplines, particularly among researchers who had history of measurement development, both from the fields of demography and economics.
- Operational researchers and researchers who developed large scale surveys argued for the importance of pragmatism in measures development, noting that lengthy measures and those requiring higher level training for survey administration were unlikely to succeed. Researchers based in academic settings argued for the importance of measures that were sufficiently detailed and nuanced to capture the complexity of social and behavioral phenomena of interest. Some researchers also argued for the need for innovation to move beyond survey measures, but while there was general agreement regarding this point, discussions were often stymied by examples of innovations.

*There was great interest in building gender equality and empowerment measurement science in India, but some key issues were identified as important barriers that would need to be considered and addressed to foster this work.*

- Among academic researchers, there were concerns regarding recognition of the value of measures development as a focus of their field. Thus, while their interest may be high, only post-tenure may they have the luxury to pursue it. Journals focused on measures development are largely in the field of psychology, and thus those outside of this field may receive less credit within their disciplines for such publications. More senior faculty did not express this concern.
- The science of survey development and psychometric testing is not standard training across many of the academic fields conducting survey research or analyzing large scale survey data. To support more rigorous science in measures development, collaboration with and trainings from researchers with measurement science expertise would be helpful. Senior faculty expressed particular interest in such collaboration opportunities as well as training opportunities for their students and post-doctoral fellows in these areas.
- While there was ample representation of economists and demographers at this forum, and some representation from public health researchers as well, those from other disciplines were lacking. Researchers from education, sociology and social work also engage in quantitative survey research but were less represented in the discussion. Big data researchers were also identified as an absence from our experts. More effort is needed to engage experts from these fields with interest in gender equality and empowerment measures.
- A number of qualitative researchers were invited but declined to participate due to the focus of the proposed work on quantitative measures; more outreach and engagement of qualitative researchers is needed as their content input is relevant and their methods are needed for formative research to support development of quantitative measures.
- While there was much agreement on the importance of measuring gender empowerment as a process of voice, choice, agency and action, both individual and collective, discussion of measures often lapsed into gender differentials on key

assets, opportunities, and participation, particularly in areas of labor and education. More focused discussion on the empowerment process and how to measure the iterative advancement in the process is needed.

*Important gaps in measurement were identified among our experts with no disagreement, though as noted earlier, areas of focus tended to fall across discipline lines with time use and economic empowerment gaps noted more by economists and gaps related to household and health coming more from demographers. We also note gaps in dimensions and the empowerment process on which probed but were unable to identify measures.*

- There is a recognized value in developing quantitative measures to assess the *Process of Empowerment* for diverse women and girls within India, and the opportunity to develop measures that can be of best use not only for research, but also for large scale policy discussion to aid in attainment of gender equality in India. Self-help groups and other participatory and collective action contexts may be of particular use for development of such measures. Measures of this process should include both individual (psychological) empowerment, and collective empowerment.
- In terms of gender equality and empowerment in the intra-household dimension, measures of *Autonomy and Household Decision-Making Control* were highlighted as important in documenting gender empowerment. While such measures exist in the NFHS, there was some question of their utility across issues and their relevance across groups.
- In terms of gender equality and empowerment in the social dimension, external to households, participants highlighted the need for better measures of *Safety and Violence in Public Spaces*, noting that girls may under report this for fear that their freedom of movement may be compromised; possibilities of observations and perhaps use of CCTV or social media to monitor this were discussed. *Girls' Education to Vocation* was also noted as important to capture, as current assessments focus on receipt or completion of education without consideration of its use toward life goals. The role of math and science education for girls was noted as part of the education to vocation trajectory.
- In terms of gender equality and empowerment in the economic dimension, there was a great deal of discussion regarding the weaknesses of current measures. For *Financial Inclusion*, participants highlighted that assessments must go beyond determination of whether a woman has a bank account and should assess perceived access to formal banking systems, their value to women, and what facilitates women's use of these systems. With regard to *Female Labor Force Participation*, there is concern that recent observed reductions in women's labor force participation, per NFHS-4, are due to measures not capturing women's multiple jobs and informal labor. An additional concern relates to women's choice in labor and gender roles that affect women's desire to participate in the labor force.
- In terms of gender equality and empowerment in the time-use dimension, there were concerns regarding the difficulty of taking these measures to scale, due to their intensity. Further, there was discussion regarding how current time use measures consider women's control over their own time and enjoyment of their time use.
- In terms of gender equality and empowerment in the environment and sustainability dimension, lesser discussion and fewer measures were identified. More research is needed to understand vulnerabilities unique to women and girls based on environmental factors and stresses such as poor working conditions, pollution, climate change, natural disasters and other environmental shocks. It is also important to consider how existing social and gender norms and structural factors affect these vulnerabilities and women and girls' ability to adapt to or escape from them.

*There is need to move beyond traditional survey methods and incorporate innovative methods of measurement*

- There is recognition that self-reported surveys often do not produce an accurate assessment of constructs of interest, including rates of domestic violence, decision making control and perceptions of safety, due to stigma or potential costs of disclosure. There is a need to develop and pilot innovative survey methods to overcome this. Implicit Assessment Testing, games, accessories, role playing, vignettes, and methods that borrow or combine those used in fields of academic inquiry that are not traditionally field-based, show promise.
- Using existing novel data sources, including CCTV camera footage and other big data sources, new methodologies could be developed for measurement that can contribute to the science in a cost effective way at scale.

## **CONCLUSION**

This scoping effort highlights the great progress and commitment of India to reducing gender-based inequalities, and the large-scale efforts that the country has undertaken toward this end via use of rigorous research. Still, there is ample opportunity for progress and a need for continued dedicated effort that could be improved upon with better gender equality and empowerment measures. India is poised to be in a leadership position to develop new measures, based on their capital of both well trained researchers and large scale data and evaluation work. Resources, training and multi-

disciplinary collaboration to support those interested in the field will be able to rapidly produce strong and innovative science in the area of gender equality and empowerment measures for health and development.

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