

Notes for 'M&E Tools and Approaches: Women's Empowerment'

Slide 2- Approach to measuring women's empowerment

With the end of CLP-2 approaching, we've published a comprehensive series of lessons learnt, one of which is our lessons learnt on measuring women's empowerment. Due to our Donor requirements, there was a need to be able to measure and assess the extent to which CLP was empowering women on the chars. CLP went through several phases with its approach to measuring women's empowerment (see slide).

Originally, our LogFrame only accounted for women's self-confidence as the sole indicator of women's empowerment (Approach 1). However, women's empowerment, like 'extreme-poverty', is multidimensional, and using one indicator to measure it was obviously not going to be adequate or paint the full picture. Also, because CLP-2 aimed to directly target over 78,000 extreme-poor char women, the Programme's Innovations, Monitoring, Learning and Communications Division (IMLC) decided that a more comprehensive approach to measuring women's empowerment and the impact of the Programme was necessary. Thus in 2010, IMLC began researching how other projects were monitoring women's empowerment. Based on this and internal discussions, a questionnaire comprising 200 questions and measuring around 50 indicators was developed (Approach 2).

However, despite this method providing us with very rich data, it was a time-consuming process and because of this the response rate was low. Also, there was no mechanism in place to be able to tell whether a woman was empowered or not (if she met 25/50 indicators was she empowered? 50/50?).

In 2012, this approach was overhauled; IMLC conducted a literature review and decided to base our conceptual framework to measuring women's empowerment on a document from DFID's Social Development Advisor who used World Bank's definition of empowerment¹. The literature also suggested women's empowerment was highly contextual, therefore CLP set out to replace the old approach with one that took into account that women's empowerment is context-specific. To do this, we sought input from chars communities on their definition of women's empowerment.

CLP used participatory fieldwork to determine appropriate and context-specific indicators of empowerment for women living on the chars. We conducted 25 focus group discussions in 2012 with both men and women from the chars. A stratified sample of participants who had not yet received CLP support, were at the time receiving CLP support, and participants who's support period had ended was used. Both male and female-headed households were included as well as frontline staff from our implementing organisations.²

During these focus group discussions, women were asked their perceptions on women's empowerment on the chars and how an empowered women could be identified. Each focus group developed a list of 20 indicators that in their opinion were the criteria of an empowered

¹ Definition of women's empowerment: a process of enhancing disadvantaged individual's or group's *capacity* to make choices and *transform* those choices into desired actions and outcomes

² For more information on how CLP developed our scorecard approach, please see http://clp-bangladesh.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/monitoring-women_s-empowerment3.pdf

woman. IMLC then used pair-wise ranking to help better understand the ranked importance of each of the indicators identified by each focus group. Indicators that were ranked as important the most number of times during the ranking exercise were chosen to comprise the chars empowerment scorecard.

The chars empowerment scorecard comprised of ten indicators and was the final approach CLP used to measure women's empowerment in our working areas (Approach 3). However, it was not perfect. It was later realised that not all of the indicators identified were applicable to women in female-headed households. Separate focus group discussions were conducted with women from female-headed households to determine which indicators would adequately measure their empowerment and which were not applicable. Based on this, proxy questions for female-headed households were inserted in the questionnaire.

Slide 3- Women's Empowerment: Context-Specific

Before you take a look at what the char women choose as the indicators that in their opinion signify empowerment, think about how the women you work with or even how you yourself would define empowerment. What indicators would they/you choose as most important? On this slide there are a few examples of indicators people might come up with. However, as was emphasised on the previous slide, women's empowerment is context-specific. The indicators on this slide, although representative of my opinion of empowerment, most likely would not match with what women on the chars think. To give a bit of a spoiler, education and violence against women indicators did not factor in the top ten indicators identified by people living on the chars.

Slide 4- Final Result (Scorecard)

Our chars empowerment scorecard consisted of the following indicators, which were identified by the chars community:

- Joint decision-making
- Keeps the family cash
- Influences investment decisions
- Has an independent income (in the last 6 months)
- Has her own savings
- Has membership in a group or a committee (within last six months)
- Has received training or attended a meeting (within last 6 months)
- Ability to solve conflict (within last 12 months)
- Being asked for advice (within last 6 months)
- Being invited to a social occasion (within last 12 months)

These indicators were split between both community and household levels to allow for a more in-depth analysis. However, the ten indicators were binary and equally weighted so no one indicator was more important than another. Women received one point for each criterion they met. They needed to meet any five criteria to be considered empowered.

As mentioned previously, for female-headed households, three of these indicators were identified as non-applicable: joint decision-making, keeping family cash, and influencing

decisions regarding investments. These indicators were replaced with the following, respectively:

- Making decisions independent of her family and/or community
- Ownership of asset
- Being treated well by family

The chars empowerment scorecard allowed CLP to measure women's empowerment at different stages of the Programme: pre-entry, during programme support and post-programme. This enabled us to 1) monitor the changes in women's empowerment over time, and 2) to measure the exact number of women it empowered through our comprehensive package of interventions.

Slide 5- Results

Unfortunately, because the scorecard approach was not developed until 2012, there is no baseline data available for Cohorts 2.1-2.3. However, with the latter cohorts it is quite clear that women's empowerment exponentially increases over time from baseline. The earlier cohorts are demonstrative of the sustaining impact in the short-term of these results. For example, at the time of the survey in October 2015, the women in Cohort 2.1 were more than four years removed from Programme support, yet 88% of women still met five or more indicators.

Cohort 2.6 had a fairly high baseline compared to the two preceding cohorts: 15% of the women were considered empowered upon entering the Programme. Reasons for this higher baseline rate may be attributable to a spill over effect of CLP activities. Although CLP did not start working directly with Cohort 2.6 women until 2014, it had previously worked in some 2.6 villages with prior cohorts. Because some of CLP's activities targeted the wider community, it may be likely that this was a catalyst to the baseline empowerment status of some of the 2.6 women living in these villages.

CLP's overall target was for 74% of women from Cohorts 2.4-2.6 to be empowered. As can be seen on the chart displayed on this slide, CLP met and exceeded this target: by 2015, 92% of participants were categorised as empowered.

Slide 6- Results: Indicator-wise

When women first joined CLP, on average they met only two of ten indicators. The most frequently met indicators at baseline were keeping family cash (43%) and independent income (25%); the least met indicators at baseline were attending a meeting/training (0.5%) and membership in a group/committee (0.57%).

By the 2015 survey, on average women surveyed from cohorts 2.4-2.6 were meeting just over seven of the indicators. The most frequently met indicators after Programme intervention ended were attending a meeting/training (90%) and membership in a group/committee (87%). Both rates may have been slightly inflated because of the fact that the survey question asks women whether they have within the last 6 months attended any meeting or training or whether or not they are currently a member of any committee/group. Because Cohort 2.5 had only just finished receiving support four months prior to the October 2015 survey, and Cohort 2.6 was in the middle of receiving support, this meant that the women participants in these cohorts would have by default attended trainings provided by

CLP within the last 6 months and been a member of a CLP-established group such as a social development group, a village development committee, or a village savings and loans group.

The least frequently met indicators after CLP support were ability to resolve conflict (50.7%) and invitation to social occasions (56.8%). By way of explanation, our most recent report on women's empowerment trends explains that there may have been an issue with the ability to resolve conflict question in the survey. It asked whether or not in the last 6 months a woman has solved a conflict between households, no additional questions were asked as to whether or not a woman actually encountered a conflict, whether she encountered one but was unsuccessful. Thus the question seemed to target if the women had the OPPORTUNITY to solve a conflict rather than whether or not she had the ABILITY to solve one. Also there was possible survey bias [question interpretation variation]- did it have to be between two households? Why not between community members, friends, even family members? There was also erratic data for invitations to social occasions indicator, which may hint at its high tangibility (ie. Participant must have been invited to a social occasion by non-blood relations).

Slide 7- Results: Impact of having an independent income

We complemented our quantitative approaches with qualitative research. This qualitative research allowed for a more in-depth understanding of how CLP interventions impact the women we work with, and which activities in particular contribute the most to empowering our participants. Such qualitative research has revealed that women believe CLP's asset transfer project and our social development component are the biggest catalysts of empowerment, and that having an independent income is very important. Our most recent study on women's empowerment, which can be found on our website, suggested that having an independent income is a strong predictor of whether or not a woman meets other empowerment indicators.

As the slide shows, if a woman had an independent income she was:

- 1.6 times more likely to keep the family cash
- 4 times more likely to have personal savings
- 2.3 times more likely to be invited to social occasions
- 2.7 times more likely to attend meetings or trainings
- 3.4 times more likely to be a member of a committee
- 12 times more likely to be considered empowered according to the chars empowerment scorecard.

Slide 8- Lessons Learnt

Lesson 1: Community involvement in defining women's empowerment results in a defensible approach. As discussed, the concept of women's empowerment is extremely context-specific. Thus if the operationalisation of the concept (how we measure it) comes from the people we are trying to observe, it results in a defensible, context-specific approach.

Lesson 2: Use mixed methods to collect data. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data can facilitate more defensible and in-depth research. CLP conducted field research, including focus group discussions, to help develop a quantitative scorecard; data was collected via interview-based questionnaires; this approach was also complemented with regular qualitative studies for a deeper understanding of CLP's impacts on women's empowerment.

Lesson 3: Even some things can be overlooked. For example, it was not until after the scorecard was developed that it was discovered that some indicators were only applicable to male-headed households. Adjustments had to be made to make the indicators relevant to female-headed households as well.

Lesson 4: The definition of women's empowerment is context-specific and likely to change over time. At different stages and in different situations, the definition of empowerment for a woman is likely to change. We saw a difference between the importance of certain indicators over time from when a woman first entered the Programme to when she finished i.e. increased importance was placed on the ability to solve conflicts, invitation to social occasions and independent income.

Lesson 5: Acknowledge the risk that questions can be interpreted in different ways.

Lesson 6: Account for the possibility that respondents will tell you what they think you want to hear. Both lessons 5 and 6 (survey and respondent bias) are typical risks associated with surveys.

This newest study on women's empowerment can be found here: <http://clp-bangladesh.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Reults-and-trends-in-womens-empowerment-on-the-chars1.pdf>

The lessons learnt brief on measuring women's empowerment can be found here: <http://clp-bangladesh.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/women-empowerment.pdf>