



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/lean-not-mean-streamlined-tool-measuring-women%E2%999s-empowerment>

Lean But Not Mean: A Streamlined Tool for Measuring Women's Empowerment



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In the three and a half years since the [Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index](#) (WEAI) launched, this innovative tool to measure women and men's empowerment and inclusion in the agriculture sector has spread far and wide: We have released a [baseline report](#) summarizing results for 13 Feed the Future countries, almost 20 USAID missions have used the WEAI as a key performance monitoring and diagnostic tool, more than 40 partners have adapted the WEAI for use in their own projects, and academics around the world have integrated the tool into their research.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which commissioned the development of the WEAI in partnership with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), is thrilled to see this tool is helping many development partners better understand and track gender equality and female empowerment. At the same time, these diverse users have provided us with valuable feedback that we've taken to heart. We've heard from some that the survey is too costly to collect, or takes too long, or contains certain modules that are problematic in the field.

In the spirit of learning and adapting, USAID worked with IFPRI to develop a new version of the WEAI that responds to these concerns. The Abbreviated WEAI, or A-WEAI, has been condensed, adjusted and reworked in such a way that it still covers the five domains that the WEAI was designed to measure, but is a more streamlined tool for others to use. Much like skim milk, the A-WEAI does not replace the original WEAI, but rather offers an alternative for those interested in a lighter, nimbler version.

Read on to discover more about the A-WEAI and why your organization may want to choose to use it.

Why was the A-WEAI developed?

Given the critical importance of adequate monitoring and evaluation of gender in agriculture and food security programming,

we want uptake of the WEAI across the development landscape to continue to increase. To achieve this, we had to make it more accessible to different types of users. We originally developed the WEAI specifically for Feed the Future to monitor how its programming was supporting and promoting women’s empowerment. This original WEAI is the most comprehensive measure of empowerment in agriculture, yet requires significant time and money to implement – resources that many partners who could strongly benefit from using the tool did not have.

Therefore, we took on the goal of cutting the field time of the original WEAI by 30 percent to create an Abbreviated WEAI. This would reduce the cost of fielding the WEAI and make it easier to integrate into already large surveys. We also wanted to streamline the survey and improve certain modules that had presented difficulties during our baseline collection.

How was the A-WEAI developed?

USAID and IFPRI, in consultation with OPHI, have been developing the A-WEAI for over a year since the need first became apparent following a learning event held at IFPRI in November 2013. Drawing on feedback from partners and baseline data collection of the original WEAI, a questionnaire was developed to pilot various modified and condensed questions. **Cognitive testing** was used to assess whether respondents interpreted questions as they were intended – an important step given some concerns during baseline collection as to whether respondents understood the questions that were being asked.

We conducted pilot fieldwork in **Bangladesh** and **Uganda** in 2014. Then we thoroughly **analyzed** pilot data and compared it with baseline data before making recommendations for the A-WEAI.

How does the A-WEAI differ from the original WEAI?

The A-WEAI preserves the same five domains of empowerment as the original WEAI: production, resources, income, leadership, and time use. However, it reduces the number of indicators from 10 to six.

The following table compares the original WEAI with the A-WEAI.

Original WEAI	Abbreviated WEAI
 <p>Production</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input in productive decisions • Autonomy in production 	 <p>Production</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input in productive decisions
 <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership of assets • Purchase, sale, transfer of assets • Access to and decisions on credit 	 <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership of assets • Access to and decisions on credit
 <p>Income</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control over the use of income 	 <p>Income</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control over the use of income
 <p>Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Member • Speaking in public 	 <p>Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Member
 <p>Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure • Workload 	 <p>Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workload

The original 10 indicators in the WEAI all represent important dimensions of empowerment, and we had to make some difficult choices when selecting which indicators to drop. Here’s why we dropped four:

Autonomy in production: Autonomy is extremely important to empowerment, but enumerators and respondents found the original autonomy questions, which focused on production decisions, difficult to understand. Additionally, implementing partners found it challenging to achieve changes in autonomy through development interventions in a project’s timeline. In response, we developed a series of vignettes to capture autonomy in production that will remain optional, and we are looking

to explore other areas in which autonomy may be more important (such as control over income, which could be affected in value chain projects, for example).

Purchase, sale and transfer of assets: Our analysis of pilot data revealed that this indicator was highly correlated with asset ownership and could be combined with that indicator without loss of information.

Speaking in public: In baseline data collection, concerns surfaced regarding the sensitive nature of these questions in certain contexts, sometimes making them impossible to collect at all. We piloted questions designed to be broader and less controversial, but ultimately their value in analysis does not outweigh the concerns about sensitivity.

Leisure: Leisure was also a concept that was difficult to convey and understand in some contexts. In addition, the indicator was problematic due to the adaptive expectations of many women about an appropriate level of leisure. Our analysis found that more men were actually dissatisfied with their leisure time than women, likely because women had lower expectations.

In addition to dropping these four indicators, several modifications were made to streamline the questions in the remaining indicators, adjust their sequencing, and improve some wording. In total, the final A-WEAI questionnaire takes an estimated 25 to 30 minutes to administer per person, an improvement over the original WEAI questionnaire, which required 40 to 45 minutes.

Check out the A-WEAI [questionnaire](#), [enumerator's manual](#), and [instructional guide](#) for further technical guidance on using this new tool.

Which WEAI should I use?

For those for whom comparability with the Feed the Future WEAI data collection is an important consideration, the original WEAI may continue to be appropriate. The A-WEAI is only comparable to the original baselines if analysis is restricted to the six indicators. The original WEAI also remains the most comprehensive tool depicting the fullest picture of women's empowerment in agriculture.

However, for those partners interested in a shorter instrument that requires fewer resources to collect, the A-WEAI represents a new opportunity for partners to access the technical rigor of the WEAI with less time and money. The A-WEAI also forms the starting point of the new Project-level WEAI (or Pro-WEAI), which is currently [under development](#).

While the A-WEAI addresses some critical constraints to uptake of the WEAI, it will not always be the right answer for every organization interested in measuring women's empowerment. The various versions of the WEAI (the original WEAI, A-WEAI and Pro-WEAI) represent a menu of options for partners to choose from based on resources, interests and needs. Still not sure which to use? Check out this [table](#) for more information on the differences and intended uses for each version.

Regardless of which version of the tool you choose, you'll gain a fuller understanding of the key dimensions underlying women's empowerment in agriculture—and be back for seconds.