Measuring Women's Empowerment

RESEARCHER GATHERING

Thursday, May 25, 2017 | 9:30 am–5:00 pm

Samberg Conference Center | MIT Chang Building (E52), Floor 6, Dining Room 4

50 Memorial Drive | Cambridge, MA 02142

Agenda

TIME	SESSION
9:30 – 9:35	**Welcome**	Rebecca Rouse (IPA)
9:35 – 9:45	**Opening Remarks**	Rachel Glennerster (J-PAL)
9:45 – 10:45	**Frameworks for Defining and Measuring Women's Empowerment**

This session will examine definitions and conceptual frameworks of empowerment across subfields and disciplines, such as development and feminist economics and anthropology. Other disciplines have specific definitions of empowerment, and economists do not always use the same terms. Are our definitions and frameworks of women's empowerment fundamentally different or are we just using different jargon? What lessons we can draw across frameworks to strengthen how we define and measure empowerment?

Presenter: Jennifer McCleary-Sills (The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)
Discussant: Rachel Glennerster (J-PAL)

10:45 – 11:00	**Coffee Break**
11:00 – 12:15	**Improving How We Measure Decision-making Power**

Some of the most commonly used survey questions, often from the Demographic and Health Surveys, for measuring women's agency and decision-making power focus on participation and influence in household decisions, particularly spending decisions. But some researchers have recently reported that wording these questions even slightly differently has led to very different answers. Do these standard survey questions capture what we hope to understand about decision-making processes? What advice can we provide about ways to improve or supplement them with other questions, better questions, or non-survey instruments to generate a fuller picture of household decision-making?

Presenters: Markus Goldstein (World Bank), Alessandra Voena (University of Chicago)
Discussant: Anja Sautmann (Brown University)

12:15 – 1:00   **Lunch**

1:00 – 2:15   **Moving Beyond Access and Participation in Financial Inclusion and Labor Markets**

Many policymakers, donors, practitioners, and researchers classify access to resources, such as affordable financial services, and participation in the labor market as indicators of women's economic empowerment or factors that encourage empowerment. In reality, a job or access to financial services may not be a sign of empowerment; women may be stuck in low-quality jobs or forced to work. Should we be trying to distinguish between jobs/borrowing behavior that empower women or indicate empowerment, and working/borrowing out of necessity? Are there better ways to measure the quality of access or participation and track whether they are contributing to empowerment?

Presenters: Jenny Aker (The Fletcher School, Tufts University), Leora Klapper (World Bank)

2:15 – 3:15   **Measuring Violence Against Women**

Violence against women, particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence, is one of the most egregious violations of women's human rights. Capturing the prevalence of violence against women, and how an intervention may affect this violence, is crucial to understanding empowerment. Yet, this kind of sensitive information can be extremely difficult to obtain. In addition to reporting bias, in some cases attempting to elicit information about violence may actually put women at risk. How can we structure surveys, or use non-survey instruments or administrative data to elicit more accurate information about violence? Are there innovations from developed countries that may also be relevant in developing countries, and vice versa?

Presenters: Anna Aizer (Brown University), Jeannie Annan (International Rescue Committee)

3:15 – 3:30   **Coffee Break**

3:30 – 4:45   **Innovations in Non-survey Instruments**

There has been a recent explosion in the use of non-survey instruments, such as games, vignettes, structured community activities, and purchase decisions to measure indicators related to agency, decision-making, prejudice, and attitudes towards women. However, some researchers have raised concerns about what these instruments actually measure. For example, do implicit association tests really capture measures of bias? How valid are these criticisms? Are there promising new non-survey instruments we should test? What advice can we give on how and when should we use these tools to complement surveys?

Presenter: Simone Schaner (Dartmouth College)

4:45 – 5:00   **Closing Remarks** | Rebecca Rouse (IPA) and Claire Walsh (J-PAL)