MAGNET
MEASURES FOR ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

AUGUST 2021

Measuring Women's Sense of Control and Efficacy

MOTIVATION AND POLICY RELEVANCE

Increasing women's sense of control over their lives is key to reducing gender inequalities and improving development outcomes (Wuepper and Lybbert 2017; Donald et al. 2020). Research suggests women tend to believe less in their abilities to act effectively towards their goals and they provide more importance than men to external factors determining their life events (Sherman, Higgs, and Williams 1997; Dercon, and Singh 2013). An individual's sense of control over their life is also inexorably linked to the control over their time. However, gender inequalities in time allocations are pervasive. On average, women spend about three times as many hours as men on domestic and care work (United Nations 2020).

Understanding the degree to which women perceive control over their lives is critical for designing and adapting policies to change limiting local norms. This is particularly important given the proliferation of interventions that seek to transform gender norms through group-based discussions, community mobilization, or economic strategies (Abramsky et al. 2016; Ellsberg et al. 2015). Yet, more work is needed to know how to best capture women's sense of control and ability over their economic lives, and how it relates to well-being outcomes (Edmonds, Feigenberg,and Leight 2020; McKelway 2021).

Social expectations about women's unpaid care roles impose severe constraints on women's well-being and livelihoods and are, thus, integrally linked to women's agency. Yet, this linkage is not well defined in recent measures of women's empowerment, which tend to incorporate time use only in terms of time poverty or having an excessive workload. While a focus on time poverty is useful and intuitive from a well-being perspective—a

Measures for Advancing Gender Equality (MAGNET)

The Measures for Advancing Gender Equality (MAGNET) initiative aims to broaden and deepen the measurement of women's agency, based on the development of new tools and rigorous testing and comparison of both new and existing methods for measuring agency, and promoting the adoption of these measures at scale. By increasing the availability of innovative meaningful measures of agency for a broad range of contexts, we hope our work will lead to an improved understanding of what women's agency is, how it manifests and how it can best be measured across contexts given the research question at hand.

MAGNET is a collaboration between the World Bank's Africa Gender Innovation Lab and Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) teams, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and researchers at Oxford University. We plan to develop a range of new survey tools, each tested across multiple contexts. MAGNET focuses on three dimensions of women's agency that have high potential for catalyzing progress on women's economic empowerment, but for which the body of existing measurement methods is weak or under-tested: (i) ownership and control of assets, (ii) goal-setting and decision-making, and (iii) sense of control and efficacy.

GENDER INNOVATION LAB
LSMS Living Standards Measurement Study
IFPRI INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

long workday decreases individual well-being, in terms of physical and mental fatigue— what time poverty reveals about agency is less clear (Eissler et al. 2021).

Women's individual agency also depends on the power they derive from interacting and working with others to pursue shared goals. This important aspect of agency is commonly defined as "collective agency". Existing measures are currently too difficult to scale up (owing to interview length), inadequately conceptualized, or conditional on membership in a group.

This brief summarizes existing knowledge gaps in these three key measurement areas and lays out how the Measures for Advancing Gender Equality (MAGNET) initiative plans to tackle them.

EXISTING KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Understanding women's sense of control over their economic lives

Measuring women's agency requires understanding to what degree women believe they can purposefully achieve their goals (Kabeer 1999; Donald et al. 2020). A common conceptualization in psychology is an individual's locus of control (Rotter 1966): the degree to which an individual believes that events are caused by one's own behavior versus external factors (chance or powerful others). Available evidence suggests that a greater internal locus of control is associated with positive outcomes including human capital, technology adoption, employment outcomes, and savings (Coleman and DeLeire 2003, Heckman et al. 2006; Clark, Kassenboehmer, and Sinning 2016; Abay, Blalock, and Berhane 2017; Wuepper, Zilberman, and Sauer 2020). These previous studies, including the ones focusing on developing countries, usually apply generalized measures of locus of control. But long-standing critiques of this approach express that it is both a multidimensional construct and domain-specific, and therefore, measurement tools should account for these aspects. In addition, little is known about which "powerful others" individuals have in mind when we try to measure individuals' external locus of control.

A related psychological concept is the construct of self-efficacy: the belief in one's abilities to produce the relevant actions to act effectively towards goals (Bandura 1982; 2006). It captures a different dimension of agency than locus of control since, for example, an individual might believe that outcomes may be affected by one's behavior but not that they themselves are able to manifest that behavior. We may expect self-efficacy to be very relevant for many economic decisions, and particularly so for women in low-income settings (Wuepper and Lybbert 2017). In terms of measurement, there have been two main ways to characterize self-efficacy. One is to treat it as domain-specific, which has implied using domain-specific self-efficacy scales. In developing countries, these scales have been adapted to measure women's agency in entrepreneurship, health, or contraceptive use (Asante and Doku 2010; Shaweno and Tekletsadik 2013; McKenzie and Puerto 2017; Closson et al. 2018; Bahorski et al. 2019). But to our knowledge, there are currently no validated self-efficacy scales specific to agriculture in low-income countries, although the agricultural sector employs most of the labor force across these countries. The second measurement approach is to conceptualize self-efficacy as a generalized personality trait and measure it with General Self-Efficacy Scales, which have been shown to be associated with positive outcomes such as female education and employment aspirations (Roy, Morton, and Bhattacharya 2018). But there is still a need for a measure that is applicable across economic activities and captures livelihoods in general, rather than a generalized personality trait, in low-income contexts.

Understanding women's control over time allocations

Time allocations display highly gendered patterns across the globe. Women experience much higher levels of time poverty due to the disproportionate share of care and domestic work they bear. This limits the number of hours they can dedicate to other activities such as training and working. Recent work has made progress towards the measurement of time poverty in low-income countries (Wodon and Bardasi 2006; Khanna and Thomas 2019; Rubiano-Matulevich and Viollaz 2019; Seymour et al. 2019).

But further research is needed to understand how to interpret time allocations as reflections of women's agency across settings. Eissler et al. (2021) show that time-use agency, defined as the confidence in and the ability to make an act upon strategic choices about how to allocate one's time, is salient among both women and men and dictates how women and men can make and act upon strategic decisions related to their time use. Key knowledge gaps persist in understanding the

interplay among women's preferences, social pressure, and internalized social norms in determining women's time allocations. For instance, we may not always want to interpret working long hours as a reflection of a lack of agency; hours worked will depend on both an individual's control over her time use and her preferences (Laszlo et al. 2020; Eissler et al. 2021).

Understanding the components and gendered patterns of cognitive labor also remains largely understudied. According to Daminger (2019), cognitive labor includes anticipating needs, identifying options for meeting those needs, deciding among the options, and monitoring the results. Albeit distinct from the physical and emotional dimensions of household labor, cognitive labor is related to multitasking, time fragmentation, and time pressure. But, from a theoretical perspective, it remains unclear how cognitive labor relates to agency. MAGNET plans to answer several research questions, such as: What are the components of cognitive labor? How is cognitive labor distributed between men and women in dual-adult households? How does this differ from how physical labor is distributed? What is the relationship between the distribution of cognitive labor and intra-household power dynamics?

Understanding women's collective agency

Women's agency is also constructed through interacting with others, deciding collectively, and working to pursue shared goals. Collective agency is important across multiple life domains including economic, family, or political decisions (Pandolfelli, Meinzen-Dick, and Dohrn 2007). The role of collective action for expanding women's agency is not a new concept. Women's associations have played a key role in the expansion of women's rights across history, from suffragette movements to current feminist networks (Evans and Nambiar 2013). Research in development economics shows that women's participation in groups can strengthen women's voices inside and outside the household and significantly improve their well-being (Brody et al. 2015, 2017). Yet nationally representative surveys have generally ignored women's collective agency and have failed to properly measure it (Yount et al. 2020). This is partly because it is hard to measure and the relationships between collective action and women's agency are both domain-specific and context-heterogenous. Commonly used measures are currently too difficult to scale up (owing to interview length), inadequately conceptualized, or conditional on membership in a group. There are also very few tools capturing women's collective agency when interviewing groups as a whole. We aim to shed light on several questions including: how can we measure collective agency when interviewing groups as a whole? How can individuals achieve goals within groups? Which types of groups are most effective at empowering women? How can different groups increase their impact on collective agency?

MAGNET WORKPLAN

MAGNET will design new scales to measure locus of control, agricultural self-efficacy, and a generalized efficacy livelihoods scale. We will also develop new survey instruments for measuring women's control over time allocation and validate it using a combination of qualitative studies, vignettes, and lab-in-the-field experiments. Once validated, the instrument could be added to existing time-use survey methods, allowing for interpretation of time-use patterns through the lens of women's agency, or used as a substitute for traditional time-use survey methods in contexts where women's agency is the primary outcome of interest. Finally, we will develop a qualitative-led group-level instrument to measure women's collective agency.

Psychometric scales:

MAGNET will develop and test new scales to capture sense of agency. These will include:

- A domain-specific agricultural self-efficacy scale applicable to low-income contexts.
- A new short locus of control scale that delves deeper into who are the "powerful others."
- A Generalized Efficacy Livelihoods Scale to capture to what extent women perceive a sense of control and ability over their economic lives, and how it relates to economic and wellbeing outcomes.

Group-based surveys:

MAGNET will develop a modular survey tool to measure collective agency at a group-level and pilot it with different types of groups with varying gender compositions across several countries.

Lab-in-the-field experiments:

MAGNET will adapt and implement lab-in-the-field experiments (Almås et al., 2018; Agness et al. 2021) to elicit men's and women's valuation of time and control over income via short-term job offers with varying wage and payment schemes.

Qualitative research:

MAGNET will implement qualitative studies to identify which are the relevant cognitive actions in the study of cognitive labor. Each of the actions identified through this qualitative work—such as who in the household is most likely to anticipate, identify, decide, and monitor each of the actions, and how satisfied individuals are with the outcomes achieved through these actions—will then be adapted as quantitative survey instrument.

Vignettes:

We will design, test, and validate vignettes—short descriptions of hypothetical individuals or situations meant to convey complicated concepts and ensure that different respondents understand questions similarly across cultures and contexts—to better understand the motivation behind men's and women's time allocations. The goal is to understand to what extent observed time use corresponds to an exercise of agency. The vignettes will be administered jointly with a standard 7-day recall-based time diary. In addition, MAGNET plans to triangulate across these measurement tools to yield richer insights on women's sense of control and efficacy. For example, we plan to triangulate answers from the time diaries and follow-up time-use questions with the time agency vignettes, and other measures of women's empowerment to understand what time activities may be classified as empowering, what each measurement approach is capturing, and how they can complement each other for a richer understanding of women's time agency. The cognitive labor mixed-methods design will also involve triangulation with standard 24-hour recall-based time diaries.

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https://www.rescue.org/

Oxford University
https://www.ox.ac.uk/

Or contact

Aletheia Donald
adonald@worldbank.org

Maria Hernandez-De-Benito
mhernandezdebeni@worldbank.org