# Empowerment Beyond the Household: Measuring and Comparing the Collective Agency of Groups and Individuals

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# Background

- Importance of collective agency—"power with"
- Heavy investment in group-based development projects
- Few indicators of collective agency
  - Group level, not just individual
  - Empowerment effects, not just instrumental in meeting (externally defined) objectives
- Important gap for external impact assessment and internal self-assessment of groups

# Project objectives

Develop measures of collective agency and apply to different types of groups with different gender compositions through partner projects in India, Uganda, Nigeria, and Guatemala.

Measures needed to address the following research questions:

1. How effective are different types of groups (e.g. producer or microfinance organizations, Self-Help Groups, resource management groups; all-female or mixed-gender groups) in enabling women to achieve collective agency? This has two parts:
   1. Group goals are aligned with women's objectives, and
   2. Group is able to achieve its goals.
2. What types of women (or men) are able to exercise voice and agency within different types of groups?
3. How is group effectiveness and the agency of different types of women and men in groups shaped by features of the group (especially organizational structure and decision-making processes) and factors external to the group?

# Methods

1. Synthetic review of the literature
2. Expert workshop
3. Lessons from studies that worked with implementation partners to develop measures related to collective agency of women within different types of groups
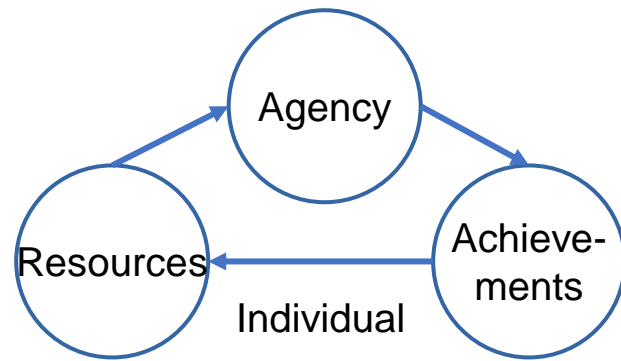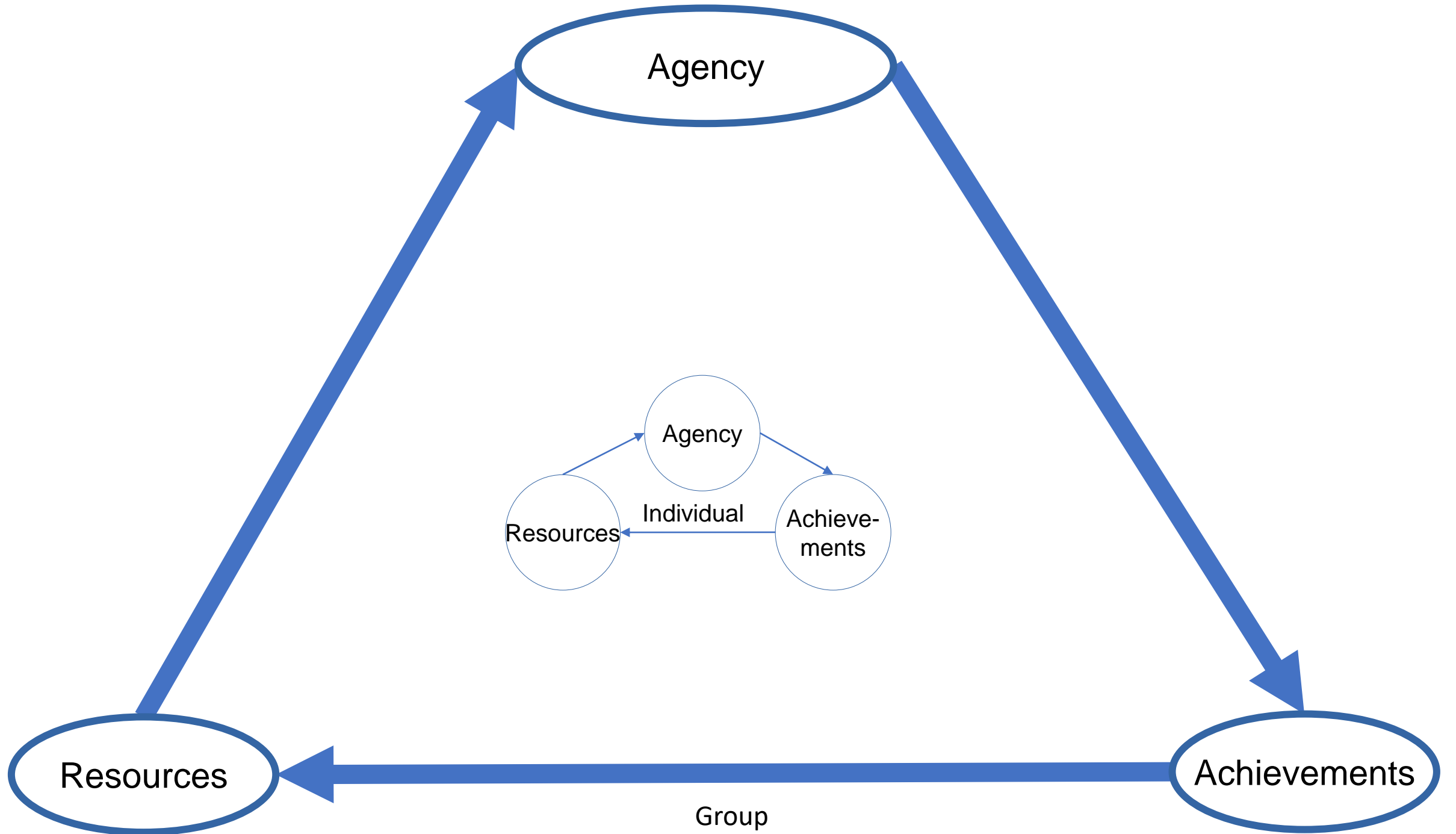
# Collective Agency: "Power With"

## Individual level

- Capacity to pursue individual's own perception of "good" (both self- and other-regarding goals, values, and rights) as a result of membership in a collective (Delea et al., 2021)

- Engagement in or leadership of groups or networks with shared goals (Yount et al., 2015)

## Collective level

- Group's or network's perceived ability to come together, establish common goals or shared interests, and take action to attain those goals/interests (Delea et al., 2021)

- Collective's capacity to pursue perceptions of "good" (e.g., goals, values, and rights) (Delea et al., 2021)

# Collective Efficacy

- Extends self-efficacy to organizations and groups, referring to beliefs about collective capacities in specific domains (Carroll et al., 2005)

- Beliefs of group members concerning "the performance capability of a social system as a whole" (Bandura,1997)

- "Respondents' confidence in the power of the community to work together for positive change in the interest of the community" (Parimi et al., 2012)

# Collective Action

- Pursuit of a goal or set of goals by two or more individuals who work together (Parimi et al., 2012)
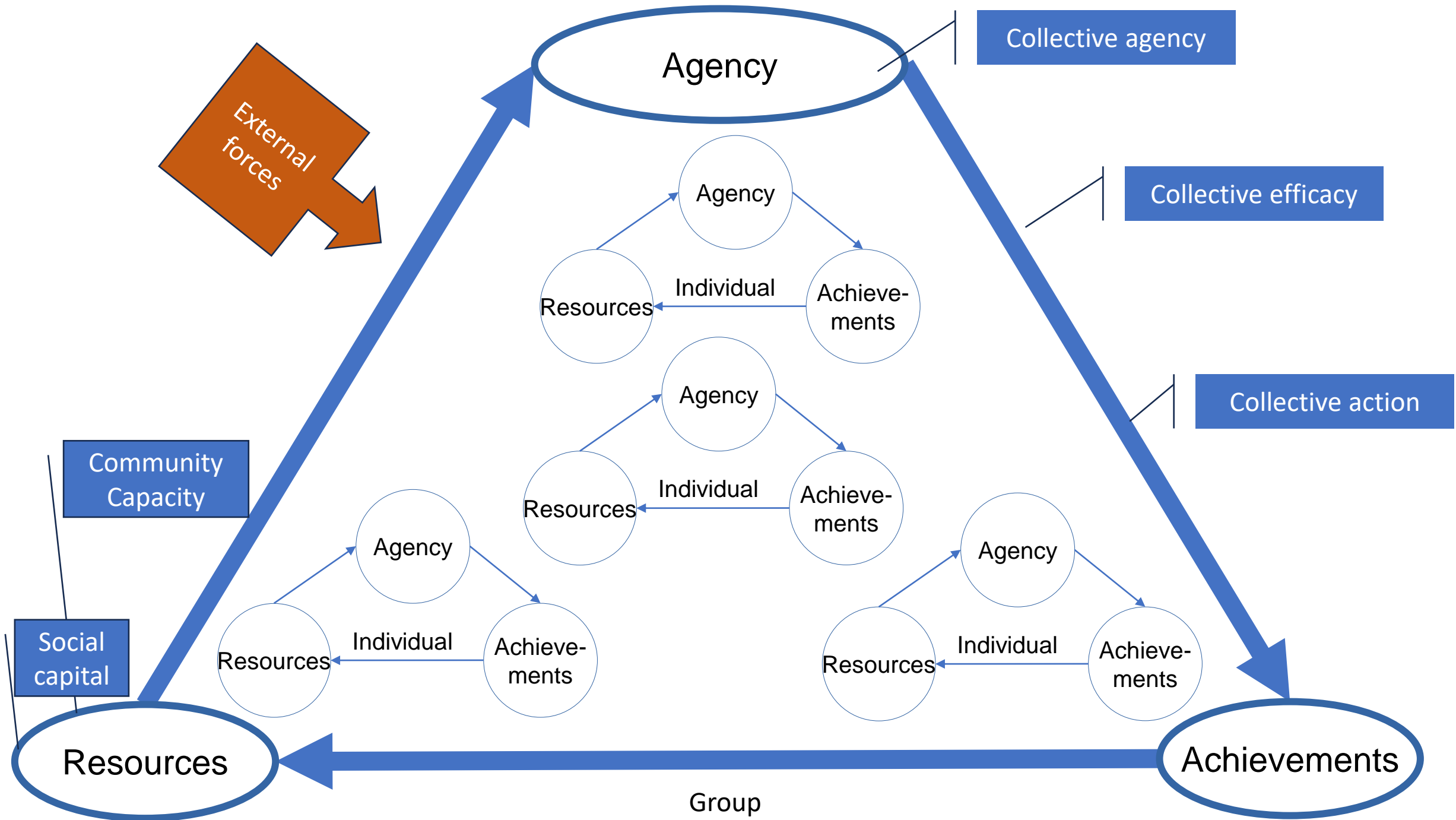
# Social Capital

- Degree of social connectedness, trust, and shared values within a community (Dean et al 2016)
- Social structure of communities as well as the norms and values by which those communities operate (Person et al 2017)
- Social networks and their associated norms of reciprocity; features of social organization and integration that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit (De Silva et al 2006)

# Community Capacity

- The ability (skills, resources, and networks) of a group to identify and act on problems (Labonte and Laverack, 2001)
- A community's ability to identify problems within their community and work together to resolve them (Lovell et al., 2015)
- Dimensions:
  1. Participation: Residents support local groups with their money or time
  2. Leadership: Leadership is strong and participatory; leaders are accessible
  3. Connections: Residents are trusting and inclusive of others
  4. Sense of place: Residents are familiar with their town's history and have an affinity with the place
  5. Community attitudes: Residents have a positive attitude toward their community and its future
  6. Problem assessment: Residents communicate to identify problems and take action

# (Collective) Achievements

- Often externally defined, depending on the type of group (and who set it up), e.g.
  - Amount collectively marketed (producer organizations)
  - Income increases (SHGs)
  - Improvements in natural resources (NRM groups)
- How do groups themselves define their objectives and achievements?
- How do different members (women and men of different backgrounds) define and value collective achievements?

# Findings from expert workshop

- A need for better and more appropriate tools to capture nuances, disarm the notion that forming groups is the same as collective agency.

- Integrate view of researchers, practitioners mobilizing women's groups, and grassroots organizations.

- Understand what is happening in the group's environment and examine questions of social capital and structural transformation.

- Agency seems to be missing from a lot of the instruments and indicators. Looks like they are more about group performance and functioning.

- Expand measurement of group outcomes beyond economic outcomes.

- Almost all current indicators are externally defined performance indicators of the group, rather than things that the group itself necessarily defines.

# Implications for Measurement

- Many latent constructs, but need clarity on what we are considering

- Need more on collective level, but be aware of heterogeneity of individual values and experiences within the collective

- Balance between measures specific to the project and context vs ones that have broader comparability

# Portfolio of partner projects

- Measures for Advancing Gender Equality (MAGNET)
- Applying New Evidence for Women's Empowerment (ANEW)
- Overcoming Roadblocks to Women's Participation through Advocacy Training
- Pan Africa Bean Research Alliance (PABRA)
- Promise of Commons initiative

# Comparative potential

## Countries

- India (x3)
- Uganda
- Nigeria
- Guatemala

## Group types

- Producer organizations
- Self-help groups
- Resource user groups
- Multistakeholder platforms
- Women's action committees (civil society organizations)
- All-female and mixed groups

# Measures for Advancing Gender Equality (MAGNET)

- Collaboration between IFPRI, the World Bank's LSMS team and Africa Gender Innovation Lab, the International Rescue Committee, and Oxford University

- 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.

- Focused 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:
  - Ownership and Control Over Assets
  - Sense of Control and Efficacy
  - Goal Setting and Decision-Making

# Measures for Advancing Gender Equality (MAGNET)

- Research partnership with Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN)

- Co-develop and pilot a survey module for measuring collective agency among members of PRADAN-sponsored **self-help groups** (SHGs) in India in 3 states

- Pilot survey to happen later this summer

- **Individual interviews** with 900 women members of 150 SHGs (randomly selected from 30 village organizations) + **group interviews** with 3-5 leaders (or longstanding members) for every VO and SHG

# Measures for Advancing Gender Equality (MAGNET)

- Research objectives
  - Assess the **reliability** and **validity** of the collective agency module
  - Understand the individual- and group-level **factors** that drive SHG members' **ability to exercise collective agency**
  - Test the extent to which **group-level** information on collective agency can approximate **individual-level** information

- New module measures intrinsic and instrumental **collective agency** (with elements relating to **collective efficacy** and **collective action**) and will be implemented in both interview settings

- Pilot survey will also collect information on relevant outcomes (e.g., self efficacy, food insecurity) and several individual and group characteristics (e.g., member age, education, and socioeconomic status; group size, composition, leadership, and governance practices)

# Applying New Evidence for Women's Empowerment (ANEW)

- Works with portfolio of projects to develop new empowerment metrics for market inclusion interventions, expand the evidence base on empowerment, and increase capacity of implementing partners to use these metrics.

- Focus on collectives (SHGs, FPOs, cooperatives) and high-value commodities and accompanying interventions that are considered gender sensitive and aim to empower women.

- Partners:
  - IFPRI (lead)
  - PRADAN in India
  - TechnoServe in Guatemala
  - Grameen Foundation, India
  - Root Capital, Mexico
  - Funded by Walmart Foundation

**ANEW**
APPLYING NEW EVIDENCE FOR
WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

# Applying New Evidence for Women's Empowerment (ANEW)

- Individual level M&E tool with details on participation in FPOs
  - Integrated into regular M&E data collection
  - Sex disaggregated
  - Modules on participation in the collective and group decision making
  - Two projects using this tool
- Group level M&E tool with policy checklist and details on decision-making
  - Designed to be administered with a group of three individuals in leadership positions
  - Modules on how the group operates and group activities (including gender focus)
  - Two projects using this tool
- pro-WEAI + Market Inclusion with Group Collective Agency module
  - Based on a subset of items in the Group-Related Collective Agency Scales (Delea et al., 2022)
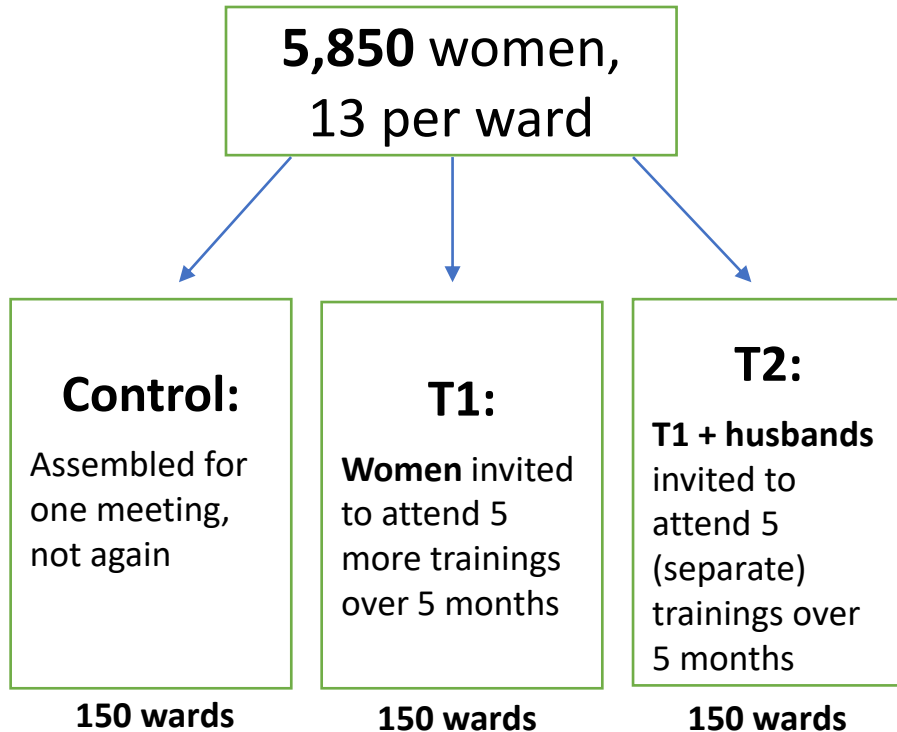  - Collected at baseline, endlines in progress (4 projects)

ANEW
APPLYING NEW EVIDENCE FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

# Overcoming Roadblocks to Women's Participation through Advocacy Training

- Project operating in 3 states in Southwest Nigeria
- Studying 'women's action committees' (new groups of women, formed by our partner, ActionAid Nigeria, for delivery of a training program intended to confer individual and collective efficacy)
- In each state, 150 rural wards (i.e., communities) randomly selected from all rural wards to be part of study
- Baseline survey, women: July 2023
- Endline survey, women and local leaders: December 2023 – January 2024

# Overcoming Roadblocks to Women's Participation through Advocacy Training

**5,850** women, 13 per ward

**Control:**
Assembled for one meeting, not again

**150 wards**

**T1:**
**Women** invited to attend 5 more trainings over 5 months

**150 wards**

**T2:**
**T1 + husbands** invited to attend 5 (separate) trainings over 5 months

**150 wards**

- Initial meeting to sign-up married women (age 21-50) and provide civic education
  - Goal: make sure all groups (C, T1, and T2) have a similar set of women/ ensure they are balanced at baseline
- **Women in T1 and T2 trained** in leadership, organizing, and advocacy, to build women's collective agency and improve their communication with policymakers
- **Men in T2 trained** to support women's empowerment, including their political and community participation
- All community residents invited to apply for a community develop grant (need 5+ names on application
- Analyze: individual-level data from women and their husbands, as well as group-level outcomes

# Overcoming Roadblocks to Women's Participation through Advocacy Training

- Data collection:
  - Women (baseline and endline) and husbands (endline)
  - Grant program-related outcomes (group-level, endline)
  - Local community leader (*baale*) survey
- Concepts measured:
  - **Collective agency:** Apply for grants; have higher-quality applications
  - **Collective efficacy:** pride in group; feel group has a lot in common; believe group can identify, organize around, and attain desired goals; belief women make good leaders
  - **Individual efficacy:** believe they can identify and attain desired goals; contact leaders/ elites about concerns; attend community meetings; believe they can communicate needs well/ clearly; believe women have key roles beyond the home
  - **Collective action:** groups organize/ act together
  - **Social capital:** participate in more groups/ community activities; trust other women/ community members; discuss politics/ local public services with others
  - **Collective achievements:** more often successful in getting a grant



Note: Sign at the 16 October women's empowerment rally in Nigeria. Credit: Projekthope (Creative Commons License)

# Pan Africa Bean Research Alliance (PABRA)

**Type of Organization - Farmer Producer Groups**

- Mastercard Farmer Network (MFN) groups: Part of collaborative efforts by MasterCard Foundation, NARS, and PABRA in project districts, targeting smallholder farmers, especially women and youth, to overcome access to resources, market, and information and increase decision-making via ICT-based solutions.

  Key expected outcomes for MFN groups: Enhancing farmers' skills, knowledge, decision-making abilities, income control, and bargaining power.

- Non-MFN Groups: Farmer producer organizations located in bean districts where no intervention was implemented, serving as comparison points.

# Sampling

- Multistage and purposive sampling procedure.

- Four regions and 13 districts in Uganda: Central (6 districts), Eastern (2 districts), Southern-western (3 districts), and Northern (2 districts).

- Survey: total 653 farmers: 529 from MFN groups, 124 from non-MFN groups.

- Qualitative data: 12 KII and 5 FGD in selected MFN districts
  - Sex-disaggregated and included farmers selected based on their experience and knowledge about MFN and group activities.

# PABRA Instruments and Concepts

Some survey questions map to multiple concepts, these concepts are inherently interrelated and often overlap.



Collective Agency and Collective Efficacy

| | Collective Agency | Collective Efficacy |
|---|---|---|
| Do you feel you could also be a group leader? | ■ | |
| Do you as an individual participate in the group decisions? | ■ | |
| If yes, as a man/woman do you think your views are respected as for other group members? | ■ | |
| If yes, please explain why you think your views are not respected as for other group members. | ■ | |
| Do you have an opportunity to speak in a group? | ■ | |
| Can you without fear raise a grievance and you expect a fair hearing? | ■ | |
| Do you feel comfortable speaking in the group? | ■ | |
| Do you think as a woman/man, you have the freedom to freely and actively participate in group decisions? | ■ | |
| As an individual, do you make decisions that matter to you or identify your goals? | ■ | |
| In the group, are you satisfied with the way final decisions on your interests are taken? | ■ | |
| As an individual, do you think the group aligns its objectives with your objectives? | ■ | |
| Is there a mechanism to handle grievances in your group? | | ■ |
| If yes how satisfied are you with the mechanism? | | ■ |
| Are you satisfied with the way the group addresses your grievances? | | ■ |

# Instruments and Concepts



Collective action and Social capital

Are there any individual benefits as a result of linkages with other platforms/groups?

What kind of benefits do you enjoy as a result of the linkages?

Are there any individual benefits derived from linkages with NGOs/GOs?

In your various activities, whom would you prefer to work with to change your life?

Do you feel comfortable working with men alone?

Do you feel comfortable working with women alone?

Do you feel comfortable working together with men and women?

Collective action | Social capital
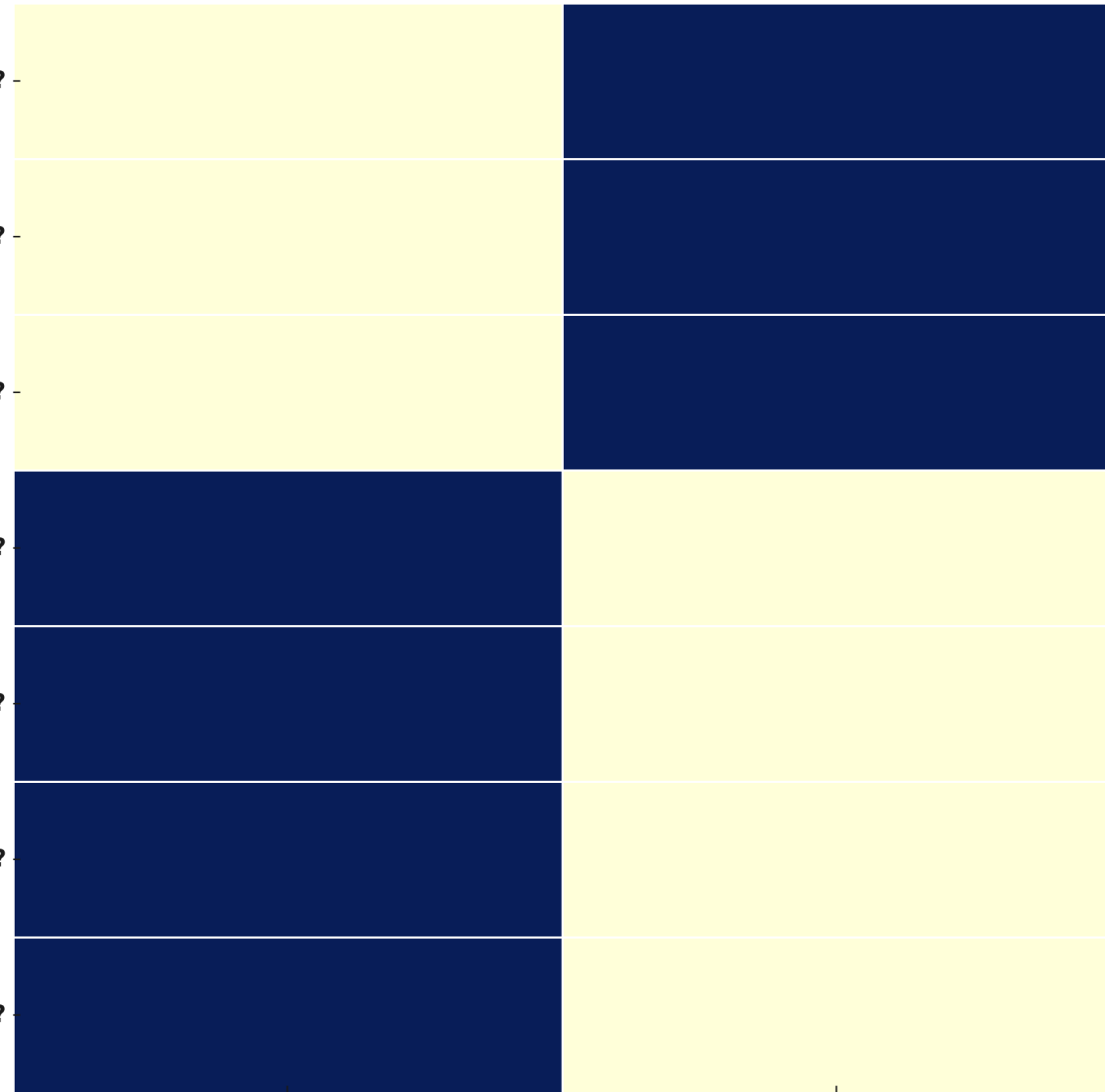
# Contextual variables in the analysis

- The analysis examines how various socioeconomic and group characteristics impact key empowerment indicators/concepts:
  - Education levels
  - Marital statuses
  - Occupations
  - Household head statuses
  - Age groups
  - Lengths of group membership
  - Modes of membership
  - Leadership roles
  - Group types
- This analysis will help us understand the intersection of these characteristics with our key concepts of interest and provide deep insights.

# What Works and Didn't Work

- **What Worked:**

- The team successfully aligned and mapped questions to concepts, which allowed for a comprehensive collection of information.

- The information collected is critical to computing the empowerment index, which will likely provide valuable insights into the project.

**What Didn't Work:**

- The Ebola outbreak disrupted data collection activities, which compelled the research team to move to areas that were considered safe.

- The disruption resulted in a low number of control districts, leading to an unbalanced representation of MFN groups and controls.

- Qualitative data collection was only conducted in MFN districts.

# Promise of Commons initiative

- Seeks to strengthen collective management of the Commons in 30 million acres in India
- Learning agenda (people level outcomes):
  - To what extent is the initiative delivering inclusive benefits at scale?
  - How are these benefits distributed (by gender and social group)?
- Assessing different types of groups:
  - Women's Self-Help Groups
  - Resource user groups (e.g. Water Users' Associations, Forest User Groups)
  - Block-level federations (multistakeholder platforms)
- Partners:
  - Led by Foundation for Ecological Security
  - IFPRI, Alliance, ICRAF, other CGIAR centers
  - Other NGOs and government agencies
  - Supported by Co-Impact, other donors

# Next Steps for the overall project

- Discussion Paper presenting framework, definitions, adaptations to each context
- Make all tools available on GENDER Platform resource hub
- Separate papers from projects