Definition of women’s empowerment

“Women’s empowerment is about the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability.”

Kabeer 1999
What is women’s empowerment?

Girl’s and Woman’s Empowerment

Meaningful choice

Resources (preconditions)
Examples:
• Human capital
• Financial capital
• Social capital
• Physical capital

Agency (process)
Examples:
• Voice
• Participation
• Decision making

Achievements (outcomes)
Examples:
• Education
• Health & nutrition
• (Income generation)
• Contraception

Resources may also be outcomes

Norms & Institutions
Note: Areas where choice previously denied may vary
Example: quotas for women

• Chattopadhyay and Duflo fits gender literature criteria for empowerment measurement well

• What is important and consequential for women in that environment? May be different in different contexts
  – Ask about women care most about compare these to men
  – Isolate what is important for women but not men (ie denied the ability to make these choices when men make these choices)

• Measures the process and whether women are involved in meaningful way in achieving change
  – Speaking up more in meetings, registering complaints

• Measures outcomes—did water quality improve as result
Challenges: econ vs other disciplines

- Going from abstract constructs (eg “ability to choose”) to measurable indicators
  - This is always a challenge in measurement
  - Harder for empowerment as not just about final outcomes, but about woman’s agency in achieving those outcomes, and about preferences that may change

- Empowerment a process: how do we measure a process rather than an outcome?

- Social desirability bias
  - Little focus in the empowerment literature

- Barriers vary by context, so must measurement (priority of impact evals)

- Having a global standard to relate to

- Realistic chance of change: if focus on ability to make “strategic life choices” then hard to measure incremental change: do we care about ability to make more choices, even if not major ones?

- Empowerment covers many aspects of life, which to focus on?
Discussion Questions

• Does this conceptual model reflect the key concepts you use in your own research and how you define empowerment?

• How well do we think our current indicators measure these concepts?

• What can public health and social and behavioral sciences learn from economics about these measures? What can economics learn from these disciplines?

• What’s the value in seeking common ground in how and what we measure when trying to capture empowerment?