



The Women's Empowerment in Nutrition Index (WENI)

Measuring women's nutrition empowerment to better link agriculture to nutrition

Many interventions that seek to address empowerment in the agricultural arena implicitly assume that they will have positive impacts on women's nutritional health. However, studies suggest that agricultural and nutritional empowerment linkages are more complex. **The Women's Empowerment in Nutrition Index (WENI) was created to identify the factors of empowerment that are important for women's nutritional outcomes.**

WENI researchers identified four dimensions of women's empowerment from literature: **knowledge, resources, agency and achievements**. These were organised into a grid (the WEN grid) with three domains salient for women's nutrition: food, health and institutions. For younger women, fertility is an additional domain.

The WEN Grid guides the identification of factors that constitute nutritional empowerment. WENI aggregates measures of these factors into a single number.

WENI was developed in the context of rural South Asia and comprises 33 indicators collected via a survey consisting of 59 unique questions. Results found the index to be significantly associated with nutritional outcomes, body mass index (BMI) and anaemia. WENI was subsequently validated in five other sites in India for which the survey was shortened and adapted for tablets.

Findings indicate that the women's empowerment in nutrition index is effective in assisting researchers to understand the nutritional status of women and their families.

Project facts



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Sudha Narayanan, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research
Erin Lentz, University of Texas

CO-INVESTIGATORS:

Anuradha De, Collaborative Research and Dissemination (CORD)
Marzia Fontana, Independent Consultant
Bharati Kulkarni, National Institute of Nutrition



COLLABORATORS:

Krushna Ranaware, Syracuse University
Sweta Bhushan, Collaborative Research and Dissemination (CORD)
Ankita Mondal, National Institute of Nutrition
Sabarmatee, SAMBHAV
Udayan Rathore, Oxford Policy Management India
Mohit Sharma, Collaborative Research and Dissemination (CORD)
Shree Saha, Cornell University
Nirali Bakhla, Indian School of Business

COLLABORATING ORGANISATIONS:

[Nijera Kori](#)
[PRADAN](#)
[Sambhav Social Service Organisation](#)
[ANWESHA](#)
[JJSS](#)
[Agragamee](#)



DURATION:

36 months (from September 2015)



COUNTRIES OF RESEARCH:

Bangladesh, India



GRANT VALUE:

£249,617

SUBSEQUENT FUNDING ACHIEVED:

£249,998 [IMMANA Grant Round 3](#)



WENI application & validation

WENI has been applied, adapted and validated by many researchers, with new projects ongoing.



PhD student Shree Saha developed an **Abridged WENI (A-WENI)** using machine learning techniques, with fewer indicators that can more easily be incorporated in household surveys for rural contexts. A-WENI consists of 20 indicators that by design is a subset of the 33 indicators used in constructing the original index. This project is in partnership with **Pragati Abhiyan**, who will use it to inform their work. A-WENI was funded by **NCAER Data Innovation Centre**.



ICRISAT's researchers implemented and validated WENI in four sites that are part of the **Village Dynamics in South Asia (VDSA)** studies. WENI was used as a proxy to capture social pathways through a mediation analysis framework, and the researchers found that marrying early gave a poor WENI score and also a poorer BMI.



Elizabeth Bageant worked on a proof of concept for applying WENI to secondary data from Niger. This work formed a **background paper** for potential collaboration with CARE. Ongoing dialogue continues regarding sharing ideas around the best ways to measure barriers and transformations related to gender.



WENI is discussed with students in the **Women's and Gender Studies programme at the University of Texas**.



Fulbright scholar, Preethi Ravi, worked with a tablet-based survey to apply WENI with a stronger health focus (**Page 12**).



Mohit Sharma collaborated with WENI investigators on a **working paper** identifying key drivers for women's nutritional empowerment and their well-being in India and Bangladesh.



Junior researchers working on WENI published a series of blog posts in **Ideas for India**.



WENI is currently being applied and tested by students in several locations including Bangladesh, India, Iran, Togo, Ghana, Ethiopia and Malawi. One example is Lila Cardell, PhD student at the University of Illinois who is exploring intra-household differences in dietary intake using the **Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey**. Dietary intake is a possible outcome measure (or "achievement") against which WENI researchers plan to benchmark women's empowerment.



Further funding achieved to extend WENI in sub-Saharan Africa

A second IMMANA Grant was awarded for the project "**Validating the Women's Empowerment in Nutrition Index in East Africa**". WENI researchers will apply the index in East Africa for the first time, validating it against anthropometric and dietary diversity outcomes, as was done in rural South Asia under the first IMMANA Grant. The work will include a cross-metric assessment of consistency across and predictive ability of several key empowerment metrics, including SWPER and WEAI.

Rich collaborations with NGOs

Strong partnerships have led to ongoing collaborative research activities.

Nijera Kori recruited community researchers to carry out WENI qualitative surveys. Findings raised concerns about domestic violence which WENI then incorporated. As a result, in 2017 Nijera Kori launched a year of awareness for domestic violence and undernutrition reaching 450,000 members. The NGO has continued to make intrahousehold issues a key component of its work. Collaborating with Nijera Kori helped WENI investigators to formulate their research agenda with questions around access to healthcare, order of eating and trade-offs.

In 2018, the **Pratichi Trust** and **MS Swaminathan Research Foundation** (MSSRF) partnered with WENI researchers to implement an abridged survey instrument in three Indian states – Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. They will use the WENI as a diagnostic tool in the areas where they work, in reporting and research. A collaborative paper is in progress.

Following a dissemination meeting at New Delhi in 2019, the **Public Health Resource Network of India** plan to implement WENI and its survey instruments.

Marzia Fontana's panel presentation at the **'Step It Up Together with Rural Women to End Hunger and Poverty'** FAO-IFAD-WFP event led to event led to UN Women developing an interest in WENI. As a result, they commissioned a **paper for the UN Women Expert Group Meeting 2017**, on achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

Pamphlets and postcards were made for survey participants and distributed by **CORD**. WENI researchers provided word clouds from conversations with women in qualitative research (salient issues for women) and posters for NGOs offices.



Timeline

