

Incorporating gender equality into GIF's impact framework

Rev. 29 January 2021

Rachna Nag Chowdhuri and Kenneth Chomitz

Overview

The Global Innovation Fund (GIF) invests in innovations with the aim of substantially improving the lives of millions of people living on less than \$5/day. GIF's challenge: to choose investments, across any sector and location, that will generate the largest possible social benefit. And to do so knowing that innovations are risky and take a long time to mature.

To select and manage investments, GIF's [Practical Impact methodology](#) uses a *single yardstick* to forecast the long-term risk-adjusted impact of innovations across all outcomes, including health, education, and livelihoods. GIF bases the forecasts on prior evidence. Investments generate new evidence, which is used to update the forecasts and to report on achieved impact.

GIF has always invested in innovations that benefit women and girls. It is now investing in innovations that explicitly aim to transform unequal gender relations for women and girls. This opens up a much wider range of impacts and outcomes, including changes in social norms, decision-making, and reduction in violence against women and girls (VAWG). This note reports on ongoing work to incorporate these outcomes into our impact framework.

Background: Practical Impact

GIF builds up its impact measure as follows. Start with the number of low-income people who will benefit, in 10 years, if the innovation scales. Adjust by the depth of benefit. Adjust again by the likelihood of success. (See figure 1). Do this in a good-enough way, aiming for the right order of magnitude, not spurious accuracy. Revise over time as risks are resolved and impacts measured.



Figure 1 Practical Impact defined

Think of one Practical Impact unit as meaning: one person got a one-time benefit equal to 100% of her annual income (or consumption). This unit is called a person-year of income-equivalent (PYI). If 20 people each received a benefit equivalent to 5% of their annual consumption, that would also be reckoned as one PYI. There are conversion rates for gains in health and education, and for reductions in mortality. PYIs can be thought of as impact-adjusted life years, analogous to DALYs. (see Box 1.)

The invention of the DALY (disability adjusted life year) indicator is an inspirational analogy. Public health officials have long grappled with the problem of setting priorities among different illnesses. Resources are limited, and there is a diverse range of pressing health issues – from mental health to malaria to cancer to HIV to diabetes. There is not an obvious way of comparing these conditions using a single yardstick.

Yet the public health community came up with a solution. The burden of an illness is computed as the duration of the illness, weighted by its severity, summed over the number of people affected. The community has been able to agree on a severity (disability) weighting for all conditions. Added to this is a reckoning of years of life lost by those with fatal conditions. The total burden is quantified in terms of DALYs. This allows the comparison of different health interventions in terms of impact (DALYs averted) or cost effectiveness (DALYs averted per dollar). The DALY approach is now widely used in research, evaluation, and policymaking.

Box 1 DALYs as an analog to Practical Impact units

Why quantify gender equality impacts in an expanded Practical Impact framework?

Prioritising investments that promote gender equality

Advocates of improved health, education and environment have learned that attaching economic values to these outcomes helps to galvanize attention and shape policy. For instance, the widely used Human Development Index highlights that development is about more than just income. Under the index, a 10% increase in life expectancy is valued as much as a 10% increase in per capita income. The System of Environmental Economic Accounting expands GNP accounting to recognize the value of ecosystem services, and to reckon the economic costs of pollution, deforestation, and greenhouse gases. Many assessments of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (‘achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’) quantify the economic costs of inequality. For instance, the World Bank estimates the global cost of gender inequality in earnings to be \$160 trillion/year. Along these lines, Duvvury et al (2019)¹ note: “Cost estimates of VAWG can be a powerful tool in achieving [the elimination of VAWG] by incentivizing countries to actively address violence, develop realizable strategies, and ensure allocation of adequate resources.”

Selecting impactful gender investments

GIF lacks the resources to fund all the worthy proposals it receives. Choosing one over another will reflect value judgments, implicitly or explicitly. Implicit judgments are likely to be inconsistent. Practical Impact forces us to articulate our values, assess how and why we expect an innovation to be beneficial, and to confront the real trade-offs involved in choosing among diverse opportunities.

Understanding impact and contributing to decisions by others

Quantification also helps us frame a monitoring and evaluation strategy so that we can learn about the impact and cost-effectiveness of different kinds of interventions. Yardsticks for impact help the wider community learn what kinds of interventions are most effective, in which contexts, with the potential to better understand the ways these contribute to positive change in the complex social systems that constrain women and girls.

In summary, we believe that a properly designed gender equality yardstick could guide investment, promote learning, and highlight the importance of directing more attention and resources towards gender equality.

¹ Duvvury, N., and others (2019). Guidance on Methods for Estimating Economic and Social Costs of Violence Against Women and Girls in Low and Middle Income Contexts. Galway: NUI Galway

A framework for adapting Practical Impact to cover gender equality approaches and outcomes

GIF has a strategic goal: Increasing the Agency of Women and Girls. “Increasing agency” is useful terminology in setting ambition as it is at the centre of achieving gender equality in both human rights and economic frames of reference.

Influenced by [Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy](#), GIF seeks to promote equality by identifying innovations that:

- Enhance **voice**, participation & decision-making amongst women and girls
- Increase control over **body**, health & freedom from violence for women and girls
- Provide women and girls access, control & ownership of **assets**

Figure 2 presents this in a framework that includes the measurement approach. Interventions operate through one of more of the *areas of intervention* to promote gender equality: voice, assets, body as described and situated on the left of the figure. These areas of intervention promote equality by supporting women’s social and economic empowerment. Impact areas are shown on the right of the figure. They include enhanced agency, reduced risk of VAWG, and better living standards. Some of these impacts may arise quickly, others may take years to emerge. Any of the interventions could result in any or all of the measures. An important feature of this framework is that agency is both a means to achieve other benefits, and an end in itself.

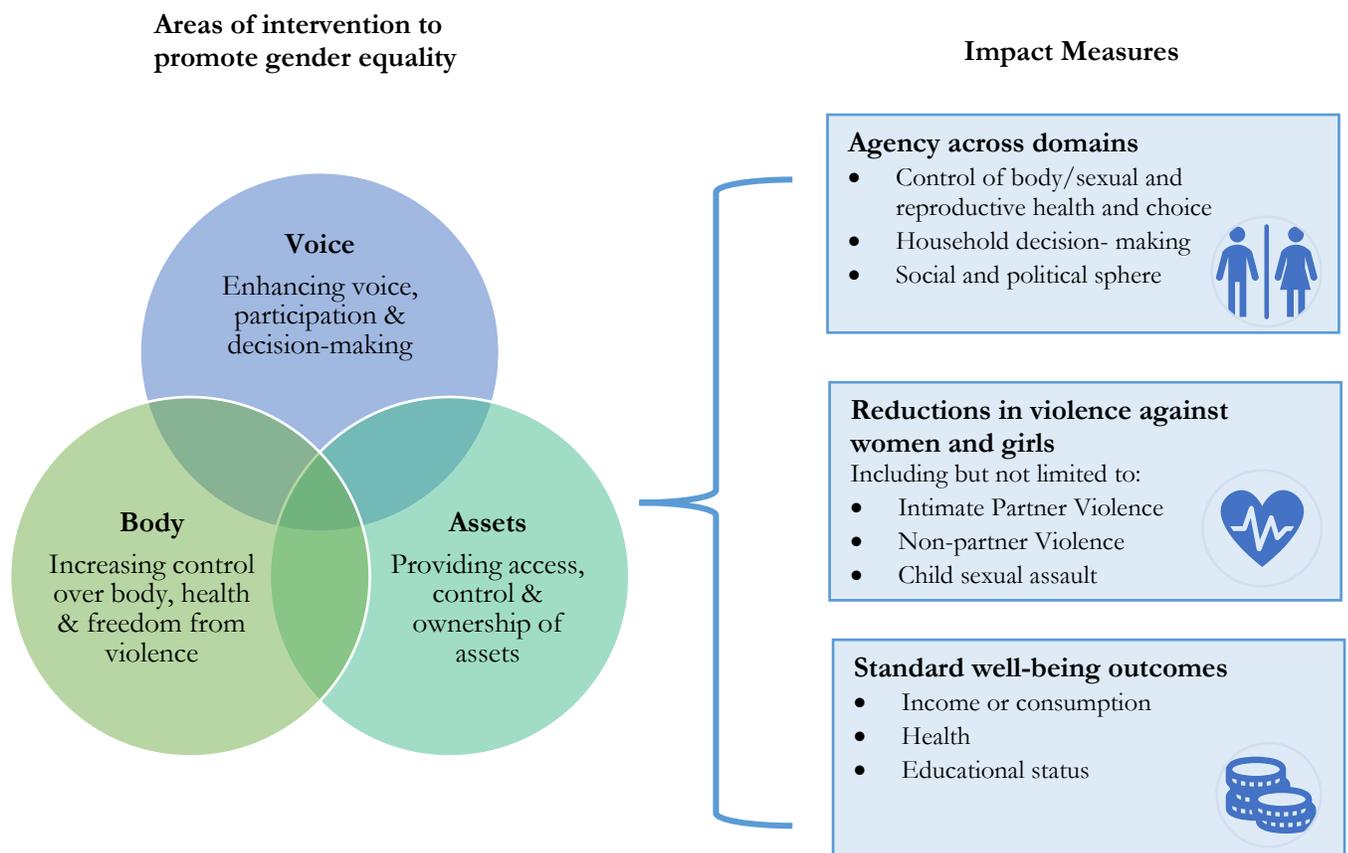


Figure 2 Framework linking gender equality interventions and impact measures

Impact Measures

Part of what makes Practical Impact practical is that it doesn't dictate specific measurement methods. Practical Impact fits available measurement into a general framework. For instance, in forecasting the impact of an income-boosting agricultural innovation, GIF's analysts look to the literature to establish reasonable expectations for the potential gain in farm profits.

Measurements, sophisticated or simple, are then translated into Practical Impact scores based on established *weights*. For instance, a one-time, 10% gain in a household's farm profits, in a household that derives half its income from farming, results in a gain of .05 practical impact unit (PVI)/person on average. Practical Impact practice would note the degree of uncertainty associated with a forecast or measurement.

Agency in different domains:

Most of the definitions of agency are derived from the work of Sen (1985) and Kabeer (1999) that describe agency as freedom of choice. Alsop et al. (2005), define agency as: existence of choice, use of choice and subsequently achievement of choice. More recently Donald et al (2017) refine this as women's ability to set goals (based on their own values), their own perception of being able to achieve the goals, and ability to act towards the goals. The ability to act, in turn, depends on women's ability to participate in decision making.

Measures: Women and girls exercise agency (or not) over many kinds of decisions in many contexts. Hence, there is diversity in agency measures. For instance, the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index assesses women's decision-making authority over a wide range of different assets – small and large livestock, poultry, mechanized and non-mechanized equipment, and so on. The challenge for Practical Impact is to set up a framework that would appropriately weight a small change in one aspect of decision making versus a wider change in several aspects.

The solution proposed here is to nominate the three domains of agency measures. These are highlighted in Figure 2. The first domain is control over body or sexual reproductive health. This includes choice, decisions and actions on contraceptives use, sexual partners, fertility, menstrual management, and own health care. Second, household decision making. This includes choice, decisions and actions on child care, household expenditure, farming/business decisions, mobility, choice of partner, and employment. Finally, domain of social decision-making, political participation and civil rights. This includes participation and decision making at community level, elected office, community groups, and legal rights.

Weights: Each of these domains represents an important aspect of life and empowerment. There is some overlap between the domains, but they are relatively distinct and may align well with different types of interventions. For any of these domains, progression from no agency to full agency would be transformative. That provides a basis for translating change within one of the domains to Practical Impact units. For instance, to calibrate the scale, we might consider that progressing from no agency to full agency along one of the dimensions might be rated as a gain of 10 PVI. An intervention that boosted agency on average by one quarter of the scale would be rated as a gain of 2.5 PVI.

Reductions in violence against women and girls:

The Elimination of Violence against Women United Nations declaration defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”².

Measures: Surveying women on VAWG is a sensitive task, but researchers have developed instruments and appropriately sensitive techniques for eliciting responses. The DHS has a comprehensive module on intimate partner violence as well as other VAWG modules, including Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), for a few countries. VAWG measures can capture the frequency of incidence of violence for individuals, duration or ‘exposure’ to violence as well as the nature of the victims (for example, adolescent vs. adult) and subsequently the impact of experiencing violence on women’s lives. Based on these considerations we can assess the severity of violence and relate it to impact.

Weights: Whether (or how) to assign weights to VAWG outcomes is the most difficult challenge of this exercise. There is substantial variation in women’s experience of VAWG, but there does not appear to be a standard index for weighting severity or frequency. However, there is evidence that more severe and chronic experience of VAWG is correlated with worse outcomes. For instance, Heise et al 2019³ categorize exposure to psychological abuse into ‘none’, ‘moderate’ and ‘high’ based on frequency, and find that more frequent abuse is associated with much higher odds of suicidal ideation, mental distress, and difficulties with daily activities.

We express reductions in VAWG as increases in ‘safe life-years’, building on a concept introduced by Every Woman Treaty. We extend the concept by adjusting safe life-years gained by severity of violence averted. A severity measure can be based on the definitions of moderate and severe VAWG recommended by UN Statistics Division⁴. Analogous to the way that DALYs are defined, severity can be defined as ranging from 0= No violence; no physical, emotional or psychological harm to 1 = Severe violence; leading to physical harm (injuries and hospitalisation), violence leading to fear of life and causes risk of death. Severity-adjusted safe life years are then converted to PYI based on a value weight.

An important special case is prevention of child marriage. This can be viewed as severe and extended VAWG. In addition, child marriage is a risk factor for an enduring restriction on agency. For this reason, a large fixed weight is assigned to each case of child marriage averted.

² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division 2014 (Page 11 “Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women”)

³ Lori Heise, Christina Pallitto, Claudia García-Moreno, Cari Jo Clark, Measuring psychological abuse by intimate partners: Constructing a cross-cultural indicator for the Sustainable Development Goals, *JSM - Population Health*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2019.100377>.

⁴ United Nations, Statistics Division, Demographic and Social Statistics, 2014, Page 20, “[Guidelines on producing statistics on violence against women: statistical surveys](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/docs/Guidelines_Statistics_VAW.pdf)”:
https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/docs/Guidelines_Statistics_VAW.pdf



Standard well-being measures:

We regard improvements in health, education, and consumption as being potential outcomes of empowerment interventions, such as increased control over assets.

Measures: Practical Impact draws from measures of consumption (for income impacts), measures of returns to education on earnings (for education impacts), and measures of DALY impacts (for health measurements).

Weights: Based on a review of the benefit-cost literature, we assign weights for income, health and education. These weights are standard across all our portfolio impacts, irrespective of whether they accrue to women or men. For instance, a review of the literature suggests a value of 1 to 1.5 PYI for each additional year of education. Similarly, we assign the value of averting a DALY as 5 PYI units. Saving a life is assigned a value of 50 PYI. Guidelines on weights assigned for standard well-being measures can be found [here](#) (page 5).

Conclusion

GIF's Practical Impact aims to ensure that gains in women's and girls' agency, and reductions in violence against women and girls, are appropriately recognized and accounted as impacts of gender-transformative investments. We hope that this tool will allow GIF and others to direct more resources to the most impactful ways to promote gender equality.