

# SURVEY BRIEF

**Focus: Women's Empowerment and Nutrition 2024**  
**within agricultural households**

**LIBERIA, SIERRA LEONE AND  
THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA**



## Survey brief. Focus: Women's Empowerment and Nutrition 2024 within agricultural households Liberia, Sierra Leone and the United Republic of Tanzania

Within the framework of the 50x2030 initiative to Close the Agricultural Data Gap, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) supported Liberia, Sierra Leone and the United Republic of Tanzania in operationalizing the Women's Empowerment Metric for National Statistical Systems (WEMNS) alongside the Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women (MDD-W) metric through the integration of a dedicated module in their 2024 annual agricultural surveys (except for the United Republic of Tanzania, where the module was included in the 2023/2024 agricultural survey). This approach is referred to as the integrated Women's Empowerment and Nutrition (WEN) approach.

The WEN survey module generates reliable, gender-disaggregated data on key dimensions of empowerment and nutrition within agricultural households, informing gender- and nutrition-sensitive policies and programmes.

### Key features

This note provides evidence-based insights on empowerment and nutrition for Liberia, Sierra Leone and the United Republic of Tanzania. It summarizes key indicators related to women's empowerment and dietary diversity within agricultural households and provides comparative data for women and men across empowerment domains. The brief also outlines the conceptual framework on which these indicators are based. This new information source enables the analysis of gender gaps and provides actionable insights to inform agricultural, nutrition, and gender equality policies. Further details are available in the respective country reports. A technical annex at the end of this document provides the main definitions, sources, and assumptions used.

## Measuring empowerment

### From concepts to metrics

The Women’s Empowerment Metric for National Statistical Systems (WEMNS) methodology conceptualizes empowerment through four key components that together determine women’s capacity to pursue their goals, make strategic life choices, and participate meaningfully in society.

#### WEMNS conceptualizes empowerment across four domains:

##### Claiming rights

What: Freedom of thought and belief (women only).

Example: She believes women should be free to choose their livelihood or partner.

##### Making choices

What: Ability to act and decide in daily life.

Example: She/He decides how to spend money or manage time.



##### Engaging in society

What: Ability to influence with others.

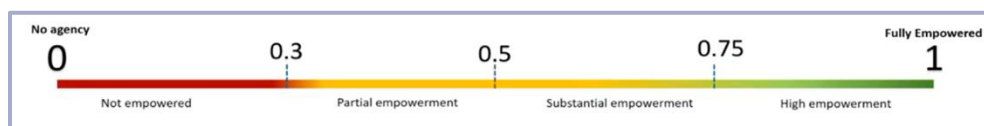
Example: She/He takes part in a community group or leads one.

##### Mobilizing resources

What: Access to tools and assets that make agency possible.

Example: She/He owns land, uses a phone, or can access credit.

For each individual, empowerment is assessed across the four domains (or areas of disempowerment) using a set of indicators. These are combined into an empowerment index, which ranges from 0 (not empowered) to 1 (fully empowered). The technical annex at the end of this document provides further details on the compilation of this index.



## Measuring dietary diversity

### From concepts to metrics

Dietary diversity is one of the four characteristics of a healthy diet, together with adequacy, balance, and moderation. Diversity refers to the inclusion of a variety of different foods and food groups in the diet (FAO and WHO, 2024).

A woman meets the Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women (MDD-W) threshold if she has consumed five or more of the ten predefined food groups in the past 24 hours. The technical annex provides further details on the construction of this index.

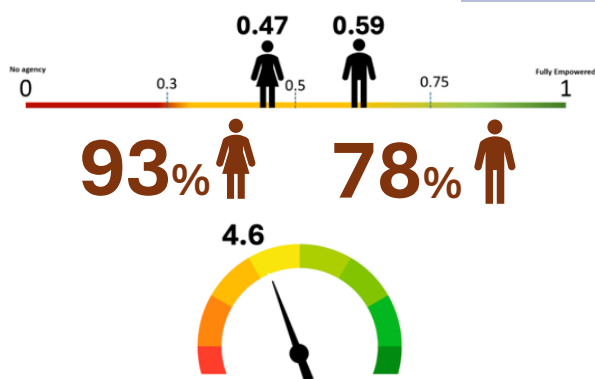


## WEN: Women's Empowerment and Nutrition

The application of the Women's Empowerment and Nutrition (WEN) module to agricultural surveys in Liberia, Sierra Leone and the United Republic of Tanzania demonstrated its potential to track countries' progress over time in empowerment and nutrition among agricultural households, while also providing insights into the linkages between these dimensions and other key development outcomes.

The three countries show similar results in terms of aggregated results.

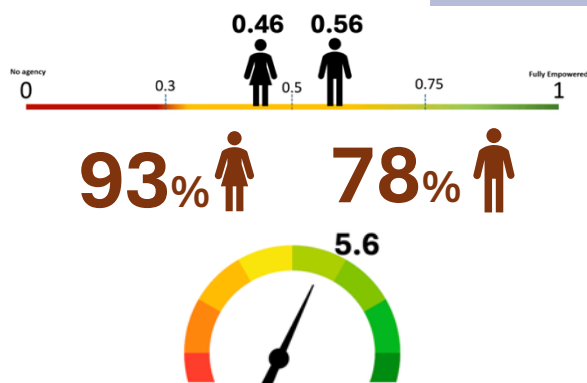
### Liberia



In Liberia, among agricultural households

- women score 0.47 on the empowerment index, compared to 0.59 for men.
- 93 percent of women and 78 percent of men are classified as disempowered.
- women consumed 4.6 food groups in the 24 hours preceding the survey.

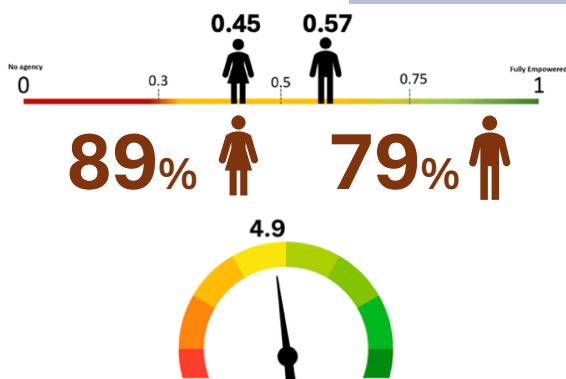
### Sierra Leone



In Sierra Leone, among agricultural households

- women score 0.46 on the empowerment index, compared to 0.56 for men.
- 93 percent of women and 78 percent of men are classified as disempowered.
- women consumed 5.6 food groups in the 24 hours preceding the survey.

### United Republic of Tanzania

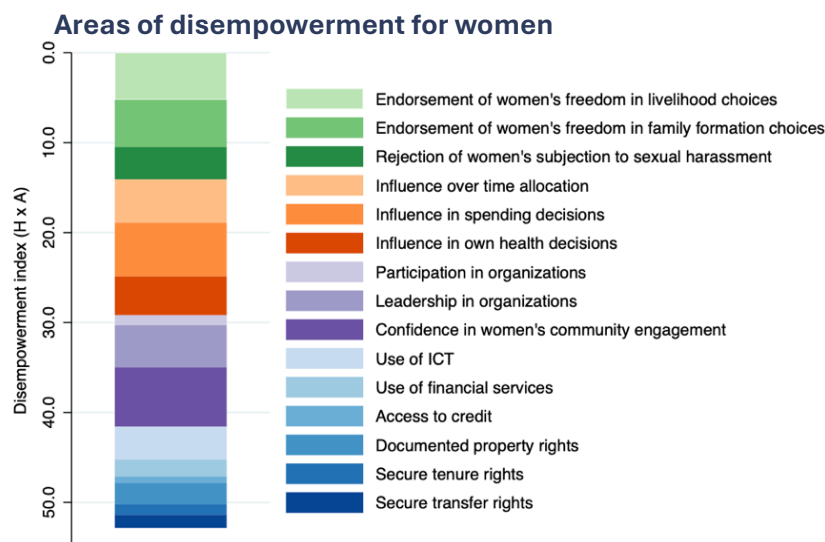


In the United Republic of Tanzania, among agricultural households

- women score 0.45 on the empowerment index, compared to 0.57 for men.
- 89 percent of women and 79 percent of men are classified as disempowered.
- women typically consumed 4.9 food groups in the 24 hours preceding the survey.

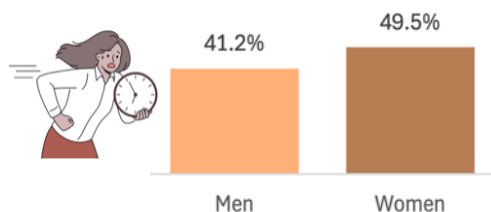
## Liberia

In Liberia, women in agricultural households are particularly constrained in areas such as influence in spending decisions and over time allocation, endorsement of their freedoms, and confidence in their community engagement. Conversely, Liberian women reported particularly strong access to credit.



## Making choices

Percentage of men/women with influence over time allocation



Across Liberia, 41.2 percent of women report having “a lot of influence” (cf. Note 2) over how they allocate their time among work, domestic duties, and leisure, versus 49.5 percent of men.



**27%**

of women reported strong influence over household spending (cf. Note 3).

## Claiming rights



**36%**

of women supported women's freedom in family formation (cf. Note 4).

And around the same number, **36%** of women affirmed that women should have the freedom to make their own livelihood choices.



**Note 1:** “H” is the disempowerment headcount ratio. “A” is the intensity of disempowerment, and it is reflected by the average disempowerment score among disempowered women or men. Further details in annex.

**Note 2:** The individual is considered unconstrained if they report having a lot of influence on whether to spend their time on all activities in which they participated in the last 7 days.

**Note 3:** The individual is unconstrained if they report having a lot of influence over any source of income and over large household purchases

**Note 4.** A woman was considered unconstrained if she fully agreed with all four statements

## Engaging in society

17%



of women express confidence in women's engagement capacity compared to 32 percent of men expressing confidence in men's capacity.

## Mobilizing resources

Women reported good access to credit and similar access as men. 82 percent of both women and men reported having the ability to obtain loans or credit (cf. Note 5)

**Note 5:** The individual is considered unconstrained if they report being able to take a loan from at least one formal or semi-formal lending source (including formal financial institutions, cooperatives, group-based microfinance, Informal credit/savings groups, other NGO programmes).

## Dietary diversity

Women in Liberia typically consumed 4.6 food groups in the day prior to the survey.

54%

of women in agricultural households consumed at least five groups out of ten.

Between age groups, younger women (18–29) demonstrate the highest proportion achieving dietary diversity in 62 percent of cases with an average of 6.4 food groups consumed (compared to the 50–64 age group that recorded only 47 percent of cases meeting the threshold). In general, women in urban areas had a more diverse diet, with 62 percent of them meeting the threshold, compared to 52 percent of women in rural areas.

## Relationship between empowerment and dietary diversity

Results show that women with greater control over resources and decision-making tend to consume more diverse and nutritious diets.

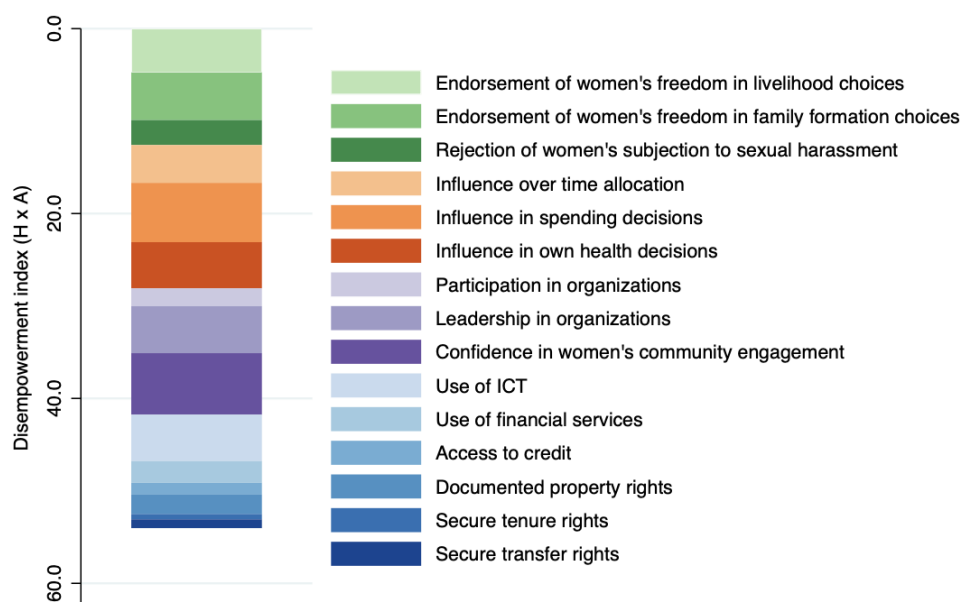
In Liberia, women who met the Minimum Dietary Diversity threshold, consuming at least five food groups, had a mean empowerment score of 0.50, compared to 0.45 among those who did not.



## Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, women in agricultural households are particularly constrained in areas such as confidence in community engagement and spending decisions. Other areas that highly contribute to disempowerment are freedom in family formation and leadership in organizations.

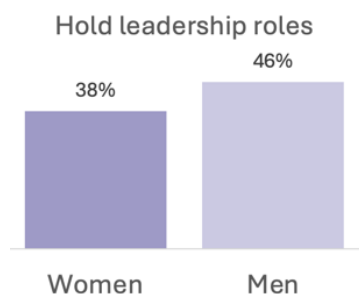
Areas of disempowerment for women



### Engaging in society

Women score particularly low in confidence in their community engagement. Only 16.3 percent of women felt confident in all aspects investigated (cf. Note 6).

**16%**  
of women are confident in their community engagement



Furthermore, 38 percent of women held leadership roles (compared with 46 percent of men).

### Claiming rights

**37%**



of women supported women's freedom to take family formation choices (cf. Note 7).

Awareness of women's rights related to family formation was reported to be higher among younger groups: 31 percent of women aged 55–64 endorsed these rights, compared with 42 percent of women aged 18–29.

**Note 6:** A woman was considered unconstrained if she agreed that women can understand what is happening in their community, have the ability to participate effectively in community activities and in decision-making, consider women's active participation in local women's issues important, and believe that most community leaders would listen to women. **Note 7:** Women who fully agreed with all five statements were classified as endorsing women's freedom in livelihood choices.

## Making choices



**21%**

of women reported strong influence over household spending, compared with 33 percent of men. This low percentage of women highlights their constrained ability to make choices that affect their daily lives.

## Dietary diversity

Women in Sierra Leone typically consumed 5.6 food groups in the day before the survey.

**75%**

of women in agricultural households consumed at least five groups out of ten with an average of 6.3



food groups. Conversely, the remaining 25 percent (around 420 000 women) only consumed 3.5 food groups on average. Educated women are more likely to achieve dietary diversity (80 percent) than illiterate women (73 percent). This suggests that education (and most likely income) plays a role in dietary knowledge, food access, or decision-making power. Moreover, dietary diversity was higher among women living in urban areas: 79 percent met the minimum dietary diversity threshold of five food groups, compared with 74 percent of women living in rural areas.

## Relationships between empowerment and dietary diversity



### Empowered women are more likely to meet minimum dietary diversity.

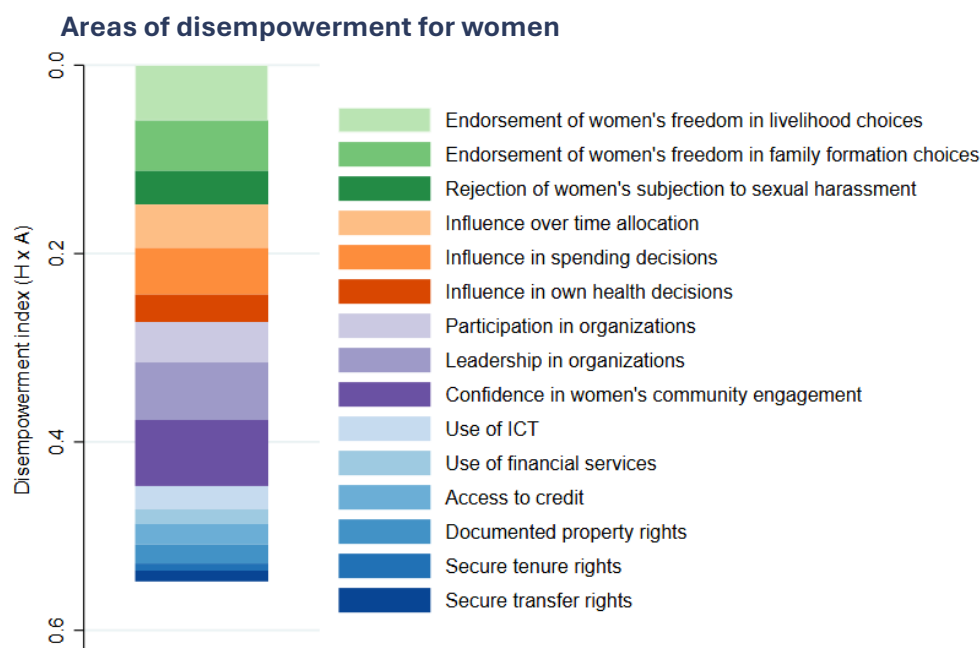
Those consuming five or more food groups reported a higher average empowerment score than those who did not. Food group consumption increases with empowerment. In particular, women with high empowerment reported higher consumption of pulses, meat, and vegetables, particularly vitamin A-rich and dark leafy vegetables.



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## United Republic of Tanzania

In the United Republic of Tanzania, women in agricultural households score particularly low in confidence in community engagement, leadership in organization, their ability to claim their rights for livelihood choices and family formation. These are dimensions that weigh heavily on the disempowerment index, as illustrated by the infographic below.



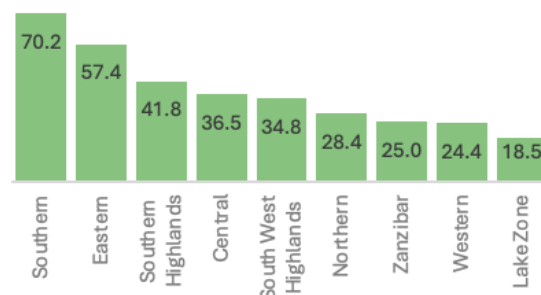
### Claiming rights

**26%**



of women said that women should have the freedom to make their own livelihood choices (complete secondary education, work for pay, prioritize paid over unpaid domestic work, decide how to use one's own income, and purchase land, housing or other major assets) (cf. Note 7).

### Percentage of women endorsing freedom in family formation by zone



**34%**



of women said that women should be free to marry, to divorce or end a relationship, to have children, or to decide not to have any more children (cf. Note 4).

Regional patterns underscored wide geographic disparities in attitudes towards women's autonomy in family life.

## Engaging in society

The main contributor to women's disempowerment is their low confidence in community engagement.

**9%**



of women expressed confidence in their ability to engage in their communities (cf. Note 8), compared with 26 percent of men, highlighting a significant gender gap in societal engagement.

Additionally, **23%**

of women reported holding leadership roles – a percentage similar to that of men (24 percent).

**Note 8.** community engagement is measured both as individuals' self-confidence and broader community attitudes regarding women's and men's roles in public life.

## Dietary diversity

Tanzanian women typically consumed about **4.9 food groups in the day before the survey**. This level of dietary diversity was higher among women living in urban areas: 65 percent met the minimum dietary diversity threshold of five food groups, compared with 54 percent of women living in rural areas.

**56.7 %**

of women aged 18–64 met the Minimum Dietary Diversity threshold, on average.

Most women reported consuming foods made from cereals (94.9 percent). Consumption of dark green leafy vegetables (65.4 percent) and meat, poultry and fish (65.3 percent) was also relatively common, indicating that these protein- and micronutrient-rich foods reach around two-thirds of women.

## Relationships between empowerment and dietary diversity

The results interestingly suggest the potential role of education in improving empowerment and nutritional outcomes for women. They show that higher education is associated with both greater decision-making power and access to more diverse diets.



In **Liberia** and **Sierra Leone**, empowerment enhances agency over food choice and access to diverse, nutritious foods. In the **United Republic of Tanzania**, higher education is associated with more diverse diets.

## Technical annex

### Scope

All indicators presented in this brief are derived from the Women's Empowerment and Nutrition (WEN) module, implemented as an extension of national agricultural surveys. Accordingly, all estimates are representative of agricultural households only and should not be interpreted as figures representing the entire population of the country, the households not engaged in own-account agricultural activities were not part of the target population. Inference beyond this reference population is not supported by the survey design.

### Sources

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## Indicators

For additional information, please refer to IFPRI (2024) and FAO (2021).

- The **WEMNS index** – or empowerment index – is a multidimensional, counting-based index that assesses empowerment for men and women (IFPRI, 2024). For each individual, empowerment is assessed across the four domains (claiming rights, making choices, engaging in society, mobilizing resources) through the following weighted indicators:



For each of the indicators, a person is identified as constrained or unconstrained.

Individuals constrained in at least 30 percent of the weighted indicators are considered disempowered. The percentage of disempowered men or women within the total male or female population is referred to as the disempowerment rate (or disempowerment headcount ratio H) and reflects the size of the disempowered population. The intensity of disempowerment (A) measures the average proportion of weighted indicators in which disempowered individuals are constrained. The combination of disempowerment rate and disempowerment intensity gives a measure of disempowerment and is referred to as the disempowerment index (H x A). The empowerment index WEMNS is calculated as  $1 - (H \times A)$  and it ranges from 0 (not empowered) to 1 (fully empowered).

The Women’s Empowerment Metric for National Statistical Systems (WEMNS) methodology was developed by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Emory University, Oxford University, and the World Bank’s Living Standards Measurement Study Unit in collaboration with country partners.

- **Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women (MDD-W)**

The MDD-W is a population-level measure of dietary diversity for women aged 15–49 years (FAO, 2021). It is based on the number of food groups consumed during the previous 24 hours. A woman is considered to meet the Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women (MDD-W) threshold if she has consumed five or more of the ten predefined food groups in the past 24 hours. The MDD-W food groups include: cereals; starchy roots, tubers, and plantains; pulses (beans, peas, and lentils); nuts and seeds; milk and milk products; meat, poultry and fish; eggs; dark green leafy vegetables; vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables; other vegetables and other fruits.

The Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women was developed by FAO and partners and launched in 2015. It has been introduced as Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicator 2.2.4.b in 2025 (UNDESA, 2025).

- Dietary diversity: one of the core principles of healthy diets and involves including a wide variety of nutritious foods within and across different food groups, in order to promote nutrient adequacy and ensure the intake of other health-promoting substances (FAO and WHO, 2024).
- Empowerment: the ability to make strategic life choices and to control key aspects of one's life (Kabeer, 1999).

The data presented in this brief are sourced from countries' surveys and may differ from data published on other FAO platforms.

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