

Objective and Subjective Well-Being: Possibilities for Supplementing Measures of Women's Empowerment

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Abstract

This article aims to re-examine the measurability of empowerment through well-being aspects in both objective and subjective terms. The concept of empowerment has gained increasing importance in approaching various inequality issues. Among them, gender equality advocacy has adopted the empowerment approach most extensively. Despite its wide usage in attempting to improve women's disadvantageous status, the actual mechanism of empowerment is not fully understood, and much less established is the way to measure it in the empirical terms. In most cases, the measurement of empowerment is skewed to objectively verifiable assessment and evaluation. Drawing on a conceptual survey of the women's empowerment and its measurability, this article depicts characteristics of definitions and measures of empowerment and explores how concepts of objective and subjective well-being could contribute to solving certain difficulties in defining and measuring women's empowerment in a balanced manner. The analysis also employs a philosophical perspective in illustrating the characteristics of empowerment as a value and exploring its objective and subjective dimensions. This study suggests a possibility to supplement the existing evaluation methods of women's empowerment, by employing subjective well-being as an additional measure and by considering the dimension between objective and subjective well-being.

Keywords

gender equality, empowerment, women, well-being, value.

The concept of empowerment has become one of the key frameworks to address inequality issues. Although it can be applied to various kinds of inequality, the empowerment approach has been applied very frequently to reduce gender inequality. Since the 1990s, numerous projects and activities have taken place around the world, addressing women's empowerment for gender equality. Especially in developing countries, many interventions have attempted to empower economically disadvantaged women, providing them with an access to economic resources and income generating opportunities.¹ More recent adoption of empowerment for gender

equality is its incorporation into national policies, as well as the major international development frameworks, such as the Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2000–2015, and the Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2016–2030.²

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With the growing interest on what kind of reforms/projects/support have empowered women, numerous discussions have also occurred concerning how to define and measure female empowerment. Questions have been raised repeatedly with regard to the concrete ways to understand and apply the empowerment approach in the actual societies as well as policies and projects, indicating that it is in much need of re-examination in the context of realities (Parpart, Rai, and Staudt 2002; Keating, Rasmussen, and Rishi 2010).

The aim of this article is to examine whether empowerment could be measured in a more balanced manner, encompassing not only objective aspects but also subjective aspects, and whether such measurement could be performed by introducing the viewpoints of well-being. Well-being represents partially, if not totally, the level of people's welfare, and it corresponds to life satisfaction, quality of life, and happiness. The first section draws on a conceptual survey of women's empowerment to portray issues of its definitions and measures. The second section explores how concepts of well-being could be instrumental in addressing certain issues of the measurement of empowerment, especially its skewed measures toward objectively recognizable indicators, such as economic, political and social indicators. The analysis also employs a philosophical perspective on value in order to elucidate the discussions because empowerment is a type of value. The actual mechanisms of empowerment have not been fully articulated especially with regard to the subjective sphere, and it is even more challenging to establish the way to measure it in empirical terms. This study searches measurement possibilities in the subjective sphere as well as in the sphere between objective and subjective well-being and explores possibilities to supplement the existing measures of women's empowerment for gender equality, attempting to bridge the gap between advocacy for women's empowerment and the actual evaluation of empowered status of women.

VARIED DEFINITIONS AND MEASURES OF EMPOWERMENT

The terrains of empowerment are markedly diverse. The earlier notion of empowerment has been closely related to social movements, serving for a variety of concepts and causes for social change in these movements. The importance of empowerment has subsequently become recognized also in governance, policy making, community interventions, and organizational management. Reflecting a variety of interest areas, the definitions and measures of empowerment have been adapted in a multiple manner.

Kabeer traces the original advocates of empowerment among the grass-root groups and claims that "the idea of empowerment expresses the interests of the disenfranchised groups of society" (Kabeer 1995:223). She points to the early usage of empowerment by the American Black radicalism in the 1960s, and a similar adoption by community development groups in the North and the South (Kabeer 1995:224). In the context of social movements for women, an early view indicated that the economic and social empowerment of women was essential in order to attain political rights (Calman, 1992), thereby considering empowerment primarily in economic and social terms as a step toward political emancipation. Searching policy implications on the relations between women's empowerment and economic development, Dufflo (2012:1053) defines women's empowerment as improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development, such as health, education, earning opportunities, rights and political participation. Rappaport (1984:3) presents empowerment as a process or a mechanism, by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives. In studies of management and psychology, the empowerment approach is a beneficial tool for management purposes. Conger (1988) summarizes management studies' findings that the practice of empowering or sharing power with subordinates would lead

to enhance managerial and organizational effectiveness and productivity, and in this respect, the empowerment approach serves as a set of useful techniques for organizational purposes.

While the empowerment approach can be applied to wide-ranging interest areas, each terrain has certain characteristics. In women's empowerment, an underlying point is the enfranchising aspect of the disenfranchised group of society. The definitions of women's empowerment derive substantially from the feminist research. Through a review of the feminist literature, Kabeer (1999b:13) points out that definitions of empowerment and empowerment-related ideas are constructed around recurring concepts, such as power, capability, rights, interests, choices, and control, and that they give importance to voice, public presence, internal strength and confidence, collective organization, reflection and analytical skills, information, and the political participation and knowledge. Kabeer conclusively defines empowerment as the ability to exercise the choice (Kabeer 1999a:437). Although the notion of exercising the choice has become pervasive in the empowerment advocacy, the measurement of how choices, desires, or preferences lead to women's empowerment is not straightforward.

In parallel with academic interests in empowerment, the 1990s saw the burgeoning interest in women's empowerment within the context of development approaches in the developing world. The 1995 *Human Development Report (HDR)*, one of the annual reports of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the development status of the world with the central notion of human development and the Human Development Index (HDI), focused on women and development, drawing attention to women's roles and the issues that women face in the course of development. In this issue, the UNDP introduced the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) to assess "whether women and men are able to actively participate in economic and political life and take part in decision-making" (UNDP

1995:4). The GEM is calculated based on women's representation in parliaments, women's share of positions classified as managerial and professional, women's participation in the active labor force, and their share of the national income.

While these are unmistakably clear variables for computing a composite measure of the women's status, an issue here is that the 1995 *HDR* measured empowerment without any definition of it. The closest notion that one can find as a definition in this report is that the GEM, concentrating on economic, political, and professional participation, seeks to determine "how much women have been empowered or enfranchised to take part in different aspects of public life, in comparison with men" (UNDP 1995:73). This report primarily assesses to what degree women have entered the public life, which is a reasonable starting point because there has been a common understanding that women have been confined to the private sphere, namely, the realms of family and kinship, while men's sphere encompassed the economic, social and political realms. Yet, due to the lack of definition of empowerment, whether this set of indicators under the GEM can accurately represent the dimensions of empowerment is unclear, and the measurement of empowerment becomes less convincing. Although it was a meaningful undertaking to initiate the use of the concept of empowerment and to establish the GEM, the indicators on the degree of women participating in public life are rather restricted dimensions of empowerment.

In the World Bank's *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook*, whose focus is empowerment of the poor, Narayan defines empowerment as "the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" (Narayan 2002:14). While this definition is what anyone could intuitively agree on, to concretize it further and to specify the actual process for it would be difficult tasks. "The expansion of assets" is a fairly measurable matter, but "the expansion

of capabilities” requires clarification and detailed exploration.

Based on an understanding that powerlessness is embedded in a culture or unequal institutional relations, Narayan adopts an institutional definition of empowerment. Reflecting on institutions and empowerment of the poor, Narayan (2002:5) enumerates “four blocks” as components of empowerment: “institutional climate,” “social and political structures,” “individual assets and capabilities,” and “collective assets and capabilities.” The fourth block, “collective assets and capabilities,” is especially distinctive in the sense that empowerment is not defined only in individual terms as she considers it as a relational concept with the importance of collective issues (Narayan 2002:6). These are areas wherein empowerment or disempowerment is played out rather than the elements that compose empowerment. Narayan’s focus being primarily on poor people and her concerns being on policy actions, it is instrumental to uncover institutional/individual/collective layouts to solve disempowerment issues. As a broad definition, she summarizes that empowerment is the freedom of choice and action, and indicates that there are four elements of empowerment: access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability (for instance, of the public or private sectors, or service providers), and local organizational capacity. These four elements are objectively verifiable, and as far as the measurement stays along these lines, the assessment of empowerment can be unambiguous.

Nevertheless, empowerment definitions can be extended to many directions. In another publication of the World Bank that Narayan edited, *Measuring Empowerment: A Cross-Disciplinary Perspective*, contributors’ definitions of empowerment range widely from economic and psychological spheres to resources-based status (Narayan 2005). This implies that empowerment discourses can be constructed in many domains and for many purposes as one can choose certain aspects of wide-ranging definitions of empowerment.

As a result of the characteristics of empowerment being extended widely, or delimited narrowly, there are difficulties in its measurement and evaluation. Depending on the definitions of empowerment, evaluation can be geared toward individual’s psychology, economic power, individual or societal resources, and collective organization. Numerous dimensions in empowerment definitions lead to numerous dimensions in empowerment measurement and evaluation. This might hinder advancement in applying further the empowerment approach to gender equality.

Another challenge in measurement and evaluation of empowerment is that even quantifiable empowerment inputs do not necessarily result in women’s empowerment. Many definitions of empowerment are those with quantifiable end results. Economic measures are the most common way to assess empowerment, reflecting a large number of economic empowerment activities. Despite quantifiable measurement of empowerment, the observed results are of great variation. For instance, a mere transfer of economic resources do not automatically lead to empowering women. A UN report states that “cash transfer programmes can have empowering effects for women, increasing their influence over household expenditure decisions and their bargaining power within interpersonal relationships” (UN Woman 2019:118). Yet, the report shows that examples across the world are varied. A study in Uruguay found that women in two-parent households were significantly more likely to make decisions regarding food expenditure after becoming eligible for the transfer. A study of Zambia’s child grant program found modest increases in women’s decision-making capacities in only five domains: children’s schooling, own income, partner’s income, children’s clothes, and family visits. After all, “having an income of one’s own, whether through paid work or social protection programs, is not automatically empowering, and that much depends on the nature of work or transfer, especially its regularity and reliability” (UN Woman

2019:122). There are evidently causality issues, which per se can open up a full debate, and this can also pose questions on how these programs evaluated beneficiaries' empowerment levels.

Narayan (2005:17-18) denotes that, given the stratification by social groups and the collective form of poverty and exclusion, collective action can seek empowerment more productively through organizations of the poor; such as groups of farmers, indigenous people; women's self-help, credit and microfinance, and water users. It seems that in the case of collective action, the success in empowerment would be evaluated by how their movement come out. However, in dealing with the idea of collective action, there seems to be a presupposition that everyone knows clearly what she or he wants in either individual or collective action. Her suggestion of collectiveness is a call for a more efficient way to approach the goal that everyone seeks. Further explanation is necessary as to whether there is a connection or non-connection between the action and the empowered state.

Definitions and measurement of empowerment are widely varied in the way that they can be applied to any purposes or agenda of the evaluators. Careful examination is needed as to what the underlying purposes are in the empowerment programs, activities and evaluation. Regarding women's empowerment, the essential notion in its definitions is the enfranchising aspect of the disenfranchised group.

COMPLEXITY OF EMPOWERMENT MEASURES AND WELL-BEING ASPECTS AS SUPPLEMENTARY MEASURES

There are certain complexities of empowerment that make its measurement problematic. These complexities derive from definitions and characteristics of empowerment, and also from the challenges in enfranchising of the disenfranchised group. Given the revealing dimensions of emerging well-being research,

well-being perspectives might be able to supplement the empowerment approach in dealing with these measurement issues. This section shows that some of the measurement problems could be mended through the introduction of well-being aspects.

Issues of Measuring Choices or Preferences

Being able to exercise the choice and to fulfill their own desires and preferences is considered as an important end in promoting women's empowerment. The empowerment approach for gender equality bolsters women's capabilities to realize desired outcomes. In this concept, there is a premise that, as far as individuals are endowed with freedom and opportunities, they can make correct decisions for themselves. However, in the empowerment approach, there is not enough critical investigation on whether women's desired outcomes and preferences are truly meaningful and empowering for themselves. There is a missing link between whether they can fulfil their desires and preferences and whether they can be empowered by such fulfillment.

In well-being studies, researchers take a closer look at what induces desires and preferences. For instance, desires can be driven by both needs and social comparison (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005:131). Although the empowerment approach in practice would least likely endorse women's desires based on needs identified without ground or needs deriving from superficial comparisons, the theoretical treatment of desires and preferences is insufficient in the empowerment approach.

Sanctifying people's desires and preferences is problematic. Well-being studies offer critical scrutiny of views such as "well-being preferentialism," a term coined by Bykvist (2016:321), which is a claim that one's well-being depends exclusively on one's desires and preferences. Bykvist warns about the preferentialism view that one is always the best judge about what is better for oneself. He reiterates that many preferences are based on false beliefs and

faulty reasoning, hence irrational (Bykvist 2016:333), and preferences can be adapted as in the situations of unfortunate people who adjust to oppressive circumstances (Bykvist 2016:336) and can mislead to justify self-sacrifice as maximum desire (Bykvist 2016:337).

Thus, it is questionable whether an individual is capable of determining the best scenario for oneself, and it is also uncertain how one can judge “the best” for oneself (individual preference). It is even more puzzling when we think about the preference for both the individual and others because it is of social and political complexity to determine “the best” for the collective body (collective preference).

Long before the emergence of well-being studies, Sen (1970) indicated the relationship between the individual preference and the collective choice as an essential issue in public choice. Along these lines, there is a great need for evaluating and assessing the relations between individual and collective preferences in the empirical terms. One way to search the best for an individual and the collective body is to look at the social relations and well-being. This suggests to analyze the evaluation of individual well-being and of the society’s well-being, and their relations.

Subjective Measures of Empowerment

The most of the measurement of empowerment has been conducted only in objective terms, and the subjective measurement of empowerment has never become an agenda of policies or projects. However, certain research pay attention to inquiries on how individuals are feeling about the change or whether there is a sense of fulfillment accompanying the change.

Narayan (2005) cites the concepts of Arjun Appadurai (2004), “terms of recognition” and “capacity to aspire,” to capture the collective aspect of psychological empowerment among impoverished groups. Appadurai claims that impoverished and excluded groups first need to change the terms of recognition in the society, by demanding

often more powerful and higher strata of the society to change social norms and expected behaviors imposed on these groups, and that generating the capacity to envision a different future is an important part of interventions and solidarity movements. Both recognizing and aspiring are psychological actions rather than objectively evident outcomes. Conceiving and measuring empowerment without subjective understanding would be partial.

By examining empirical studies on women’s empowerment, Malhotra and Schuler (2005) show that most of them are at the micro level, some at the macro level, and that the middle level is missing. They assert that we can say that empowerment has occurred if it results from the agency of the person who feels empowered and that empowerment is not felt if this person does not feel different about herself. They assert that empowerment requires a certain level of subjective assessment such as gaining self-confidence and feeling that one has more choice or freedom.

Diener and Biswas-Diener (2005) distinguish two types of empowerment. The first type is external or situational empowerment, which means “the external conditions that allow efficacious action,” and the second type is psychological empowerment or “a person’s belief that action can be effective along with the energy and desire to carry out such action” (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005:133). External or situational empowerment includes empowerment that has been more commonly recognised in social, economic, and political spheres; such as the legal status, income level, and political representation. They draw attention to the less recognized empowerment, that is, psychological empowerment as people’s belief that they have resources, energy, and competence to accomplish important goals.

They claim that external conditions for empowerment are not sufficient without internal feelings of competence, energy, and the desire to act; and that subjective well-being can be instrumental to make us capture these internal feelings and as

people's own "evaluations of their lives, including pleasant emotions, fulfillment, and life satisfaction" (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005:136). Looking into women's domestic empowerment through interviews of rural and peri-urban married women and their husbands, Mason finds that relational nature of empowerment is critical, and denotes that "women's empowerment is likely to involve not only their gaining new individual capabilities but also the emergence of new beliefs about their right to exercise these capabilities and taking advantage of opportunities in their community" (Mason 2005:90).

Subjective well-being is often considered identical to happiness. And there can be disagreements on making happiness the indicator for one's empowerment. Whether one has achieved what one wants and as a result being happy is an outcome of numerous factors. Among many criticism, Clisby states that defining happiness is problematic because happiness is "an amorphous, ambiguous, transitory state of being" (Clisby 2017:1). She points out that happiness is always a highly gendered social construct that requires understanding within contextually and culturally specific patriarchal structural frameworks.

Empowerment's Inherent Notion of Change

Empowerment inherently implies that one's original status is disempowered and that this status improves through empowerment. Kabeer (1999a:437) mentions that the notion of empowerment is "inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability." She further emphasizes that empowerment entails a process of change. Thus, empowerment per se has a notion of a directionally upward move to pursue.

Having defined the empowered state as an ability to exercise choice, Kabeer (1999a:437) elaborates the ability to exercise choice in three dimensions: resources

(pre-conditions), agency (process), and achievements (outcomes). Resources include human and social resources in addition to economic ones. Agency is the ability to define one's goals and to act upon them. The dimension of achievements might be what makes empowerment appealing for policy makers and project practitioners as it entails concrete outcomes. However, because of the uncertainty of perceiving these achievements, careful scrutiny is needed in identifying achievements that are considered as veritable empowerment.

The nature of empowerment as a process of change poses a problem of measurement. First, unless there is a discernible change, it would not be recognized as empowerment. In other words, a change has to be recognized or recorded. A person can have a change without awareness of change. In this case, this person does not recognize it as a change even though there might be objectively recognizable change. Second, it is not clear how much change would be considered as a decent change, leading thereby to a recognition of empowerment. The degree of change can be varied, but what degree would be eligible for empowerment is not evident. Third, there is a question on how long a time-frame should be for a change to be perceived as empowerment. The time-frame is often defined by practical conditions such as a project period of certain empowerment activities, or the time before and after a certain policy implementation. But, a change over a long period of time, for example, of 50 or 100 years, is not particularly regarded as empowerment, or more realistically speaking, no evaluation or inquiry is done in such a long term.

To stabilize this unstable side of empowerment as change, the well-being perspectives could be used as an additional set of indicators. Measuring well-being entails a state of being, but it is also possible to inquire about the change over a period if necessary, or to conduct time-series measurement of well-being at two points in time. While empowerment has no option other than measuring a change, well-being has options to measure as a status or change,

thus possibly serving to assess subtler dimensions of empowerment.

EMPOWERMENT AS A VALUE WITH OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE CONDITIONS

It is instrumental to consider that empowerment is a type of value and that philosophers have held extensive discussions on value. Especially, axiology has contributed to debates on value in objective and subjective perspectives. An essential axiological question is to clarify whether value is objective, subjective, or both. Regarding this classical question, Lee (1940) discusses the blurring nature of objective and subjective spheres. He describes, “there are some experiences, the sufficient conditions of which granted the existence of a consciousness, are wholly objective, as, for example, the colors of the sunset. There are some experiences, the sufficient conditions of which granted the existence of some sort of stimulus, are wholly subjective, as, for example, one’s moods and whims, many of one’s emotional states, likes, dislikes, and pleasures. There are some experiences; however, the sufficient conditions of which are neither merely objective nor merely subjective, such as, for example, the experience of beauty, of goodness, or of any kind of value. Certain objective conditions are necessary but not sufficient. Certain subjective conditions are necessary but not sufficient” (Lee 1940:631).

Objective and subjective conditions that Lee enumerates are parallel to what Diener and Biswas-Diener demonstrate as two types of empowerment: external or situational empowerment and psychological empowerment. Both of the objective and subjective dimensions constitute one’s experiences. Moreover, Lee’s indication of the experiences that are neither merely objective nor merely subjective is insightful. It implies that it is imperative to consider overlapping areas of objective and subjective dimensions in order to understand the empowerment as a whole. Hence, it is necessary to incorporate both objective and subjective conditions as

well as the overlaying dimensions between objective and subjective conditions into the measurement of value.

Lee recognizes objections to defining value in objective terms alone. For instance, objective conditions sufficient for the experience of value have not been satisfactorily identified, although much energy has been spent in the search for them. Furthermore, he denotes that the “bifurcation of nature” (original quotation) into the two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive classes of objective and subjective is neither a very profound philosophical doctrine nor does it help in an attempt to understand the nature of value (Lee 1940:631). Drawing on D. W. Prall’s *Aesthetic Judgment* (1929), he asserts that “a transaction between the objective and the subjective conditions” is necessary. Although he does not elucidate the details of such transaction, there are grounds for applying both objective and subjective perspectives to better understand the characteristics of value.

In a similar vein, there is a need to measure the full spectrum of empowerment, ranging from objective to subjective status, as empowerment is a type of value, under which power imbalances are refuted. Some discussions on empowerment have encompassed objective and subjective conditions, which might offer possibilities for a transaction between the two. Kabeer suggests the need to differentiate “inequalities in underlying capabilities” from “differences in preferences” and as a result a possibility to focus on basic fundamentals of survival and well-being (Kabeer 1999a:439). Although “differences in preferences” might appear objectively discernible phenomena, they call for subjective exploration and re-examination. There is often an equation between choice and power, wherein being able to choose means an empowered state. She points out that this is not the case as shown in the literature on gender and well-being in the form of “behaviour on the part of women which suggests that they have internalized their social status as persons of lesser value” (Kabeer 1999a:440). By pointing to women’s

internalization of their own lesser status, she argues that “power operates not only through constraints on people’s ability to make choices but also through their preferences and values and hence the choices that they may make” (Kabeer 1999a:441–2).

Nussbaum (2001:114) makes a similar criticism of the problem of choice by pointing to “adaptive preference.” She points out that habits, fears, low expectations, and unjust background conditions deform people’s choices and even their wishes for their own lives. This “adaptive preference” can be a persistent phenomenon, in which women continue to internalize low possibilities for themselves because of their life experiences. Her critiques are geared toward utilitarian preference-based views, and she suggests that what could be considered are “desires formed under appropriate conditions” and that even in that case “we do not let desire have the last word” (Nussbaum 2001:160–61).

Value theories offer some insights on how to explore empowerment as a value. Objective and subjective dimensions as well as the overlaying dimensions between the two are all substantial aspects of empowerment. Given the fact that the empowerment measurement has been mainly in objective dimensions, there is a great need for the empowerment measurement to incorporate subjective dimensions. It is more challenging to identify and to incorporate the overlaying areas between the objective and subjective dimensions of empowerment, yet such incorporation would enhance understanding of the intricate mechanisms of empowerment.

EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN’S WELL-BEING AND WELL-BEING FOR WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

There is a general presupposition that women’s empowerment would lead to a higher level of women’s well-being. An overwhelming evidence points to the instrumental significance of female empowerment through opportunities, such as income generation and educational

attainment, to improve and to enhance female subjective well-being. However, whether greater gender equality contributes to a higher level of well-being might not be so firm as one might expect. Drawing on cross-sectional data of 96 countries of the World Values Survey, Meisenberg and Woodley (2015) examined hypotheses, such as “greater gender equality raises female relative to male well-being,” “in patriarchal societies with traditional gender roles, men enjoy higher subjective well-being than women,” and “in societies with greater gender equality, women enjoy subjective well-being at least as high as that of men.” Although under many indicators, the assessment of subjective well-being does not necessarily indicate gender differences, by analyzing the correlations between gender equality and the levels of happiness and of life satisfaction, they find that high female status does not necessarily lead to a higher level of happiness and of life satisfaction for women than for men. In some cases, a lack of political, economic, and legal power to change situations is more important in explaining gender inequality in health, education, nutrition, and mortality than the willing consent of females to their own discrimination (Klasen 2007:176). Moreover, as shown in the correlation of -0.10 between relative female life satisfaction and relative female economic activity rate for a sample of 57 countries (Tesch-Römer, Motel-Klingebiel, and Tomasik 2008), women may tend not to feel satisfied with their increasing economic activity rate. This jeopardizes the premise of supporting women’s greater participation in the economic sphere as substantiated as part of female empowerment. Thus, in contrast to the explicit connection between gender equality and objective well-being, the relationship between gender equality and subjective well-being is more covert and complex.

The promotion of empowerment based on the notion of agency can serve to build objective well-being of women, and there is a question on how to situate individual and collective actors. According to Sen, female agency is understood as “the role

of the individual as a member of the public and as a participant in economic, social, and political actions,” and hence strengthening female agency tends to promote female well-being (Sen 1999:19). While Sen’s view is to define agency in relation to the public sphere, Nussbaum points to the need for “an approach that is respectful of each person’s struggle for flourishing, that treats each person as an end and as a source of agency and worth in her own right” (Nussbaum 2001:69).

Diener and Biswas-Diener (2005) consider empowerment as one of the facets of subjective well-being “because the experience of well-being includes the feeling and belief that one can accomplish one’s goals” (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005:133). They point out that cultures can be arrayed on a continuum ranging from individualistic (individual well-being and choice are granted high importance) to collectivistic (the group is seen as more important than the individual) (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005:132). They indicate that individualistic societies with greater personal freedom report high subjective well-being while these cultures also have higher levels of problems such as divorce and suicide, implying paradoxical characteristics of subjective well-being. (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005:132).

Diener and Biswas-Diener suggest the importance of understanding the characteristics of psychological empowerment in both positive and negative terms. According to them, psychological empowerment, especially feelings of power, tends to lead to action, which might be desirable, or might not be desirable particularly not at the cost of deliberate thinking or evaluation (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005:137). They call for attention to the possibility that levels of subjective well-being can influence people’s psychological empowerment.

They indicate that, in societal development, giving power to people without power might not in all cases lead them to take effective action that promotes development (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005:138). They denote that in addition to favorable external conditions, people would need psychological

or internal empowerment, and factors such as education, social support, beliefs about fate, and positive emotions will all influence the potential for effective action. Subjective well-being is especially important in capturing internal empowerment such as feelings of self-efficacy and the belief that one’s actions can be effective (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005:138).

Research findings about well-being, especially subjective well-being, might not necessarily endorse the presuppositions of women’s empowerment. However, the consideration and incorporation of both objective and subjective well-being perspectives can serve to address a more comprehensive scope of women’s empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has tried to bridge the gap between advocacy for women’s empowerment and the actual evaluation of empowered status of women, by delineating measurement issues of empowerment and searching the way to employ the aspects of subjective well-being in measuring women’s empowerment in supplementary manners.

In the context of gender equality and partly poverty issues, definitions of empowerment have been divers, making the measures of empowerment difficult tasks. In this diversity, the use of empowerment frameworks can be affected by certain agenda and institutional purposes of the evaluators. With regard to women’s empowerment, the underlying notion in its definitions is the enfranchising aspect of disenfranchised group.

With regard to how well-being perspectives could contribute to solving certain difficulties in defining and measuring empowerment in a balanced manner, the introduction of well-being aspects and especially of subjective aspects can enhance the understanding of empowerment in a more holistic way. There is a tendency that the measurement of empowerment is conducted more commonly in objective terms, using

indicators such as economic, political, social, and other objectively recognizable measures. However, there are certain opinions that affirm the importance of having subjective conditions in addition to objective ones because measuring subjective conditions may allow us to evaluate the empowered feelings, gained confidence and beliefs, and thus incorporation of subjective well-being into the measurement can be instrumental. Above all, well-being perspectives can serve to cope with three measurement issues: issues of measuring choices or preferences; subjective measures of empowerment; and empowerment's inherent notion of change.

Furthermore, an examination of philosophical aspect of value provides insights on how to deal with objective and subjective conditions in a value-assessing process. It suggests that incorporating both objective and subjective conditions is imperative because value is composed of both dimensions. It also suggests that scrutinizing the space between both of the objective and subjective dimensions and interactions would be important to assure the nature of the choice that they make. This also requires to explore combined approach of objective and subjective measures.

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Notes

1. For example, proliferation of microcredit projects for women in developing countries was expected to lead to poverty eradication and women's empowerment.
2. Both of the Goal 3 of the MDGs and the Goal 5 of the SDGs aim at gender equality and women's empowerment. While MDGs' Goal 3 focused on certain sectors, the Goal 5 of the SDGs aims to (1) end all forms of discrimination against women and girls; (2) eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls; (3) eliminate all harmful practices; (4) recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work; (5) ensure women's participation and equal opportunities for leadership in political, economic, and public life; and (6) ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (United Nations).

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