



FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative

Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index



CASE STUDY PROFILE

Maria, Guatemala

Maria is from the indigenous Mam tribe and, at 41 years old, has lived in the Paxoj village in the highlands of the Quetzaltenango district for the past 22 years. She lives with her husband, Victor, who is 48 years old, and their four children in a three-bedroom cement block house, which has dirt floors and an indoor kitchen. Maria and her husband have been married for 25 years and she feels lucky to have a husband who supports and encourages her. In sharp contrast to most women in her village, she attended university and now, like her husband, works as a secondary school teacher.

“ We have always heard that the woman has equal rights. ”

Fifteen years ago, Maria began to participate in community agriculture projects focused on vegetable cultivation but stopped to go back to school. “My husband told me that I should continue my studies,” Maria explains. She chose to train as a teacher because she “like[s] to work with kids,” recently received her degree, and began her career as an educator in 2010. While her greatest professional goal for the coming year is that the students in her care are able to read and write, her greatest personal goal is that, with her encouragement, her son will complete a university education. She highly values education and feels disappointed because one of her daughters dropped her studies to get married.



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The Mayor of Paxoj makes the majority of decisions within the community. Maria describes a leader as a “secure” person, who can bring others together. While she would like to be a leader, she does not think she has sufficient time: “Right now I have to focus on things in my own household.” She values spending time with her family and explains that most women in her community similarly dedicate themselves to their households while most of the men work in agriculture and construction. Maria enjoys tradition and laments the customs in her area—including harvest parties at the beginning of the season—that are being slowly lost in younger generations.

Maria defines empowerment as an individual’s ability to make decisions, like her neighbor, “who is always in all of the community groups and does what he wants.” Unlike some of the women in her community, who are disempowered by their husbands, Maria has felt empowered and is proud of her university degree. Victor mirrors these sentiments, describing his wife as a “beautiful and hardworking woman who understands and supports [me].”

To provide for household consumption, Maria and her family only grow maize and keep small livestock. Victor does the majority of the household’s agricultural work—although the couple splits up the duty of caring for their four pigs. Maria and Victor discuss all agricultural situations before making decisions. In fact, all decisions regarding assets, credit, and expenditures are made “between the two of [them]...always, always.” According to Maria, family communication is vital to securing a happy home, and, just as decisions are made jointly, assets—both those owned by her husband and those owned jointly between the two—are shared for use with the entire household.

Maria is empowered according to the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index and has achieved gender parity with her husband. In the Index diagram, the outer ring identifies the domains. The shaded segments inside represent the indicators in which Maria has adequate achievements.

Over the past year, Maria and Victor have spent the highest proportion of their money on medicine, followed by clothing, and education fees for the children. Maria does not believe that the individual who earns the most income (in this case, Victor) should have more control over household decisions. “We have always heard that the woman has equal rights,” she says.



Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index

This innovative new tool is composed of two sub-indexes: one measures how empowered women are within five domains, and the other measures gender parity in empowerment within the household. A woman is considered empowered if she has adequate achievements in four of the five domains or in some combination of the weighted indicators that reflect 80 percent total adequacy. Gender parity reflects the percentage of women who are as empowered as the men in their households.