TECHNICAL NOTES ON USE OF THE EMPOWERMENT MODULE

This note seeks to provide some technical guidance regarding use of the empowerment module in survey work. Please note that a further treatment of the motivation underlying the selection of the indicators and their past use is provided in Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) and Alkire (2007). This note seeks to address the following issues involved in implementing the survey:
1. Implementation of the relative autonomy questions
2. Domain selection in the household decision-making and relative autonomy questions
3. Sequencing of the domain-specific empowerment questions
4. Use of card, and two-stage question structure
5. Response structure for the relative autonomy question
6. Use of domain-specific vs. global autonomy measures
7. Statistical analysis of empowerment data

1.   Implementation

Note that the concepts included in this module may seem quite challenging, and so it is important for enumerators to take time to understand them fully. When enumerators are clear, in field tests the questions have worked very well, including when used with people with low levels of education. We have tried to use as clear language as possible but it may need to be simplified – while retaining the meaning – in order to enhance respondent understanding. The survey implementer ought to consider, ideally on the basis of careful pretesting, whether the text is appropriate or whether it ought to be amended.

2.   Domain selection

The logic for domain-specific measures is explained in depth in Ibrahim and Alkire (2007); it is essentially that people may feel able to take decisions to a different extent in different areas of their life and it is important to have a sense of this as a way of gauging their overall empowerment. The selection of specific domains remains somewhat open to the survey implementer however, and will depend on the specific purpose of the survey, and the domains being addressed therein. In a survey covering nutrition, health and education, for instance, the individual implementing the survey may want to ask about empowerment with respect to these domains and then compare the responses with objective data for these domains.

To give some examples of domain selection, DHS surveys ask about empowerment in the following domains (see DHS website, www.measuredhs.com):
- Final say on own health care
- Final say on making large household purchases
- Final say on making household purchases for daily needs
- Final say on visits to family or relatives
- Final say on food to be cooked each day
- Final say on deciding what to do with money husband earns

Ryan and Deci, who developed the relative autonomy questions, recommend a focus on the 'so-called voluntary domains of people's lives': work, relationships, leisure, religion, and spending money (Ryan and Deci, personal communication). They suggest as five domains:

- Work you do at home or on a job
- Whom you spend time with
- Any leisure activity you do
- Religious practices
- Spending money

However, their work is not designed to focus explicitly on poverty.

Alkire, in a survey of empowerment among Indian women, selected the following domains:

- Children's education
- Employment
- Household duties
- Responses to health crises
- Mobility
- Group participation

In our survey, we have tentatively selected the following domains for testing:

- Minor household expenses
- Reaction to a serious health problem
- Employment/housework
- Protection against violence
- Religious practices

We chose Minor Household Expenses as it is the single most used domain in large-scale internationally-comparable surveys. Health was included as an important and universal domain; we preferred it to education, for example, because the latter would apply only to households with children of school-going age. We were interested in empowerment in the other domains of our study – hence the questions on employment/household work and on protection against violence. We included religion as a voluntary domain applicable to the whole of the sample (as e.g., voting would not be, across countries) that might also enrich the other data being collected on meaning in life and spirituality.

In short, the domains given in the survey are suggestions only, and we recommend domain selection in line with the overall objectives of the questionnaire.

3.   **Placement and sequencing of empowerment questions**

The location and sequencing of empowerment questions requires some thought and particularly the domain specific questions. We suggest that the domain specific empowerment follow at least one objective question on the domain in question (or follow

a series of questions or module on that domain if appropriate). For instance, for employment, we would suggest asking objective questions on employment and then the two empowerment questions pertaining to household decision making in employment and relative autonomy in employment, respectively. This sequencing is the easiest for the respondents to follow. In our full survey, we ask the violence empowerment questions at the end of our module on physical safety. Similarly, the Minor Household Expenditures empowerment questions should follow (an) objective question(s) on consumption, the health empowerment questions should follow an objective question(s) on health and so on. The Minor Expenses question could follow an objective question such as 'What minor expenses have you made in the past week?' The question would permit the respondent to think objectively about the matter at hand and is a simple question for her or him to answer.

Two further examples, relating to health and religious practice, further illustrate this point:

HEALTH
For health, we first ask an objective question adapted from a World Bank LSMS survey module:
'How would you respond if you faced a serious health problem?'

Answers are country/culture-specific but could include:
Visit Medical doctor/Nurse/Health care assistant/Natural healer/Pharmacist/Family member or neighbors/Self-medicate/I would not do anything/Other

We follow this with the health decision-making questions, then the health relative autonomy questions.

RELIGION
For religious practices, we ask a question taken from the World Values survey:

'How important is religion in your life?
Would you say it is:

Very important
Rather important
Not very important
Not at all important'

followed again by the household decision-making and relative autonomy questions pertaining to religion.

In fielding our survey, we have placed the questions pertaining to religion in the Meaning and Value module where the data should also help to inform the questions on Meaning in Life, satisfaction, etc.

4.   Use of card, and two-stage question structure

For the domain-specific relative autonomy questions, in some cases it is useful to construct a card having the 4-item response on it:

not at all true	not very true	somewhat true	completely true
1	2	3	4

Some field studies have found it useful to use diagrammes alongside the text:

Not at all true   not very true   somewhat true   completely true

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
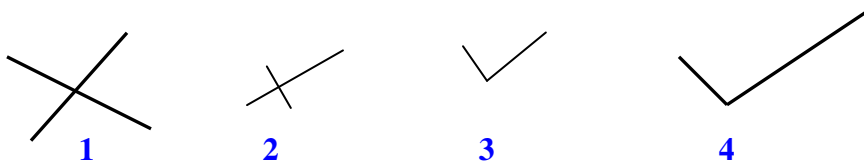
In a past empowerment survey, enumerators reported that "Almost all respondents found the card a novel and interesting way of answering questions."

In some cases enumerators found it easier to ask the question in two stages: first, was each motivation more true, or not true. When the respondent replies, they asked (if true) whether it was somewhat true or completely true; if it was not true then was it not at all true or not very true. This two-step approach applies to all the domains. We do not think that this will affect comparability of the survey across contexts

5.   Relative autonomy response structure (4 vs. 5 options)

The domain-specific relative autonomy questions seek to ascertain the motives underlying decision-making in particular areas – with respect to health, religion, violence prevention etc. One issue we are exploring at present is whether these questions should have 4 or 5 responses. The initial design had four responses: 2 negative (to avoid punishment/seek approval) and 2 positive (in line with what individual feels is valuable/integrated with individuals' larger values and activities).

Ryan and Deci describe these four categories as follows:

External Regulation: Because of external pressure (to obtain rewards or avoid punishment).
Introjected Regulation: Because doing so will gain approval by others or avoid guilt and shame.
Identified Regulation: Because the person identifies the activity to be valuable

Integrated Regulation: Because activity is both valuable, and its pursuit is integrated with the person's other activities.

To this, we add a 'no control' option to account for the respondent's possible inability to make choices in a particular domain not due to external coercion but rather due to force of circumstances (though this option is not necessarily included as part of the eventual index as it does not represent a choice, but rather the absence of possibilities to choose).

Note that we are unsure whether the 2 positive motivations will appear as distinct to individuals in different cultural contexts. In some cultural contexts (and for some domains more than others), individuals may find the idea of their activities in a particular domain being integrated into their values more generally to be an intelligible and meaningful one; in other places (and for certain domains), this may not be the case. The version of the survey given here includes a five-item response structure but the survey implementer should consider whether this makes sense or whether only one positive question should be asked (whether the individual believes their actions are guided by what is correct and valuable). This decision could perhaps be made following a pilot test if external validity tests show that respondents are not distinguishing the two concepts and/or internal validity tests show a lack of variation in the responses to the two positive questions. Individuals implementing the survey should consider whether the five-item response structure or a four-item response (in which the item about 'in harmony with deepest values' is removed) makes the most sense for their purposes.

ANALYSIS
Following Ryan and Deci, the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI) can be computed by creating a weighted sum of the scores using very simple arithmetic:
For domain 1: (-2)[external pressure response] + (-1)[others opinion response] + (1)[important response] + (2)[freely support response].

EXAMPLE
For example, if the person had answered:

External pressure	2
Others opinion	4
Important	3
Larger values	3

The RAI would be (-2)(2) + (-1)(4) + (1)(3) + (2)(3) = 1.

Note that if only one positive response is asked, then the index is then this component is then given a weight of +3 so as to offset the weights accorded to the two negative items.

At present the 'no control' option has not been integrated into the RAI.

6. Global versus domain-specific autonomy

Several questions in the module apply to agency in specific domains while others are global in nature (questions on control over personal decisions, the ability to bring about change at the individual and community levels, and the ladder question about overall empowerment – framed here as 'free choice and control over your life' to avoid an explicit mention of power).

The reason for including these varied questions is first that they touch upon various aspects of empowerment (as described at length in Ibrahim and Alkire 2007). The second reason is that we would like to determine the extent to which domain-specific and global empowerment are related in different countries and population groups. If, for instance, the answer to the domain specific empowerment and the global empowerment questions correlate closely, this could imply that individuals have a given level of empowerment that they may apply to agency across the board. Alternatively, individuals may be able to exercise different amounts of choice in different contexts (as literature on women's empowerment has suggested to date). If, in repeated studies, the domain-specific and global empowerment results in some dimensions were to correlate closely, in future surveys we may end up dropping some of the former in favor of the latter to save time. However, until this question becomes clearer, we recommend that the survey implementer include both domain-specific and overall empowerment in their surveys.

7.   Analysis

Analysis of empowerment data could serve to 1) validate the questions; 2) describe levels of and the distribution of empowerment within the sample 3) generate a composite measure of empowerment and 4) analyse the relationship between empowerment, other standard dimensions and other Missing Dimensions.

Validation of the questions is an important first step as some of these question have not been fielded extensively in nationally representative household surveys. The questions require external validation through qualitative work (to ensure that the questions are in fact seeking the concepts they purport to measure) and internal validation through statistical work.

In terms of the quantitative analysis, the analyst should begin with internal validity testing. In the first instance, this would involve looking at the frequency of responses for each question to ensure the response structure was appropriate and intelligible. They might then consider factor analysis of multi-item questions – for instance of the responses to all the domain-specific autonomy questions to determine whether the response structure is sound – i.e., if the responses across domains are loading upon the same factors as the response structure would predict. Simple correlation analysis could be used to determine whether items that purport to measure the same or similar concepts in fact relate to one another. Descriptive analysis might consider the distribution of various

indicators of empowerment by subgroup (according to gender, ethnicity, religion, region, education, income etc.). The analyst might wish to create a composite indicator of empowerment through factor analysis or by simply constructing an average. If the latter, the analyst might weight the indicators equally or assign more weight to some than to others. To relate the empowerment indicators (or composite) to other dimensions, the analyst might opt for multivariate regression analysis (to study correlates/determinants of empowerment) or to consider how empowerment contributes to income poverty or other dimensions of illbeing. Finally the analyst might want to use empowerment along other dimensions to construct a multidimensional poverty index. Many such indices exist, however Alkire and Foster (2008) in OPHI Working Paper no. 7 provide a simple and intuitive set of indices that provide a multidimensional analogy to the unidimensional FGT measures.

KEY REFERENCES

www.ophi.org - contains full Empowerment module, detailed working papers on the Module (and other Missing Dimensions), and on the Alkire/Foster multidimensional poverty indices.

www.selfdeterminationtheory.org – has other questionnaires and an introduction to the domain-specific relative autonomy questions (that is not related to developing countries)

Alkire, S. (2005) Subjective quantitative studies of human agency, *Social Indicators Research,* (74), p. 217-60.

Alkire, S (2007) "Measuring Freedoms Alongside Well-Being," in Ian Gough and J Allister McGregor, eds. *Well-Being in Developing Countries: New Approaches and Research Strategies.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Alkire, S. and Foster, J. (2008), *Counting and Multidimensional Poverty.* OPHI working Paper no. 7, available at http://www.ophi.org.uk/pubs/OPHI_WP7.pdf.

Chirkov, V., Ryan, R. et al. (2003) Differentiating Autonomy from Individualism and Independence: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective on Internalization of Cultural Orientations and Well-Being, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* (84), p. 97-110.

Ibrahim, Solava and Sabina Alkire (2007), "Empowerment and agency: A proposal for internationally-comparable indicators", *Oxford Development Studies* 35:4, December. A longer version of this paper containing detailed Appendices is available as OPHI Working Paper no. 4 at http://www.ophi.org.uk/pubs/Ibrahim_Alkire_Empowerment_FINAL.pdf.