

**Agency & Empowerment:
A proposal for internationally
comparable indicators**

Aim of the Paper

Building on existing efforts and indicators already in use, the paper aims at proposing a small, robust, internationally comparable list of empowerment indicators

Introduction

- Relevance of Empowerment for the Poor's Lives
- Empowerment and Agency as Domain-Specific
- Relationship between Empowerment and Human Agency
- The Importance of Agency and Institutional Structures for Empowerment

Empowerment: Concept and Definitions

- Review of different Definitions of Empowerment
- Focusing mainly on choice, participation, control, influence, ownership, voice and the means of overcoming different forms of oppression
- Centrality of the Concept of Power
- Relationship between Empowerment and:
 - Democratization
 - Economic Enhancement
 - Self-confidence and Self-Esteem

Claims, Hypotheses and Research Questions

- Virtuous Circle: Empowerment and Human Development
- Empowerment and Development Outcomes:
 - Governance
 - Pro-poor Growth
 - Project Effectiveness

Methodological Challenges to Empowerment Measurement

- Intrinsic or Instrumental?
- Universal or Context-specific?
- Which level of Application?
- Individual or Collective?
- Which Dimensions of Empowerment?
- Which Level of Empowerment?
- Establishing Causality
- Subjective or Objective Data?

Criteria For Choosing Empowerment Indicators

- **First**, to be *internationally comparable* thus filling the gap in the literature on empowerment studies at the macro-level
- **Secondly**, to assess not only the instrumental but also the *intrinsic* aspects of empowerment.
- **Third**, to identify *changes in empowerment levels* over time as empowerment is an ongoing process.
- **Fourth**, to draw on *experience with particular indicators* to date, i.e. how frequently they have been previously fielded and found to be 'adequate' measures of empowerment

Empowerment Indicators Related to Five main Topics

1. *Access to Credit*
2. *Household Decision-Making in different domains*
3. *Domain-specific Autonomy*
4. *Political Empowerment*

Indicator 1: Access to Credit

- Why Access to Credit?
 - Widely used Indicator
 - Limited Access to credit by impoverished people
 - Policy-relevance of the indicator
 - Measuring the existence of choice
- But!
 - Access to Credit is necessary but insufficient
 - Capped Indicator depending on market dynamics
- Other Possible indicators:
 - labour market and employment conditions
 - informal sector
 - Ability to choose one's own occupation

Access to Credit

1. Did you feel the need to borrow goods or money in the past year?

1 Yes, very often
not at all

2 Yes, fairly often

3 Yes, sometimes

4 No,

2. Did you actually borrow money or goods in the past year? 1 Yes 2 No

3. Which two sources do you most usually borrow from?

1 Bank

5 Moneylender

2 Formal Credit Association[1]

6 Family

3 Informal Credit Association

7 Friends and other Community members

4 Shopkeeper

8 Other[2] [specify and add code:_____]

Source A

Source B

4. Are there any other sources of credit for people in your area that you feel are not available to you?

1 Yes

2 No [end of questions]

5. Why are these not accessible by you?

1 Lack of Collateral

3 Interest rates too high

2 No guarantor

4 Culturally unacceptable

5 Other [specify and add code:_____][3]

[1] Note, underlined answers have been added from other existing questionnaires

[2] These prompts have been changed from: bank, credit association, shopkeeper, landlord, family and other so that the question can be more easily used in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

[3] Alsop et al (2006): 333-335

Indicator 2: Household Decision-Making

- Why Household Decision-making?
 - Household as Social Institution
 - Widely used indicator
 - key indicator for women empowerment
 - measuring the existence and exercise of choice
- The Importance of the ‘control over income’ indicator but preference for the more comprehensive “matrix”

Household Decision-Making

Q1 When decisions are made regarding the following aspects of household life, who is it that normally takes the decision?

Respondent

Spouse

Respondent and Spouse Jointly

Someone else

Jointly with Someone else

Other [Specify and add code: _____]

Household
expenditure

Education

Political

Marriage
decisions*

Religious
choices

Health

Household Decision Making and Autonomy

<p>When decisions are made regarding the following aspects of household life, who is it that normally takes the decision?</p>	<p>1.Respondent 2.Spouse 3.Respondent & Spouse Jointly 4.Someone else 5.Jointly with someone else 6.Other [<i>Specify and add code: _____</i>] <i>if 1, go to column 2; if not 1, skip to column 3.</i></p>	<p><i>If the answer on left is not 1:</i> To what degree do you <i>feel</i> you can make your own personal decisions regarding these issues if you want to? 1.1 To a very high degree 2.2 To a fairly high degree 3.3 To a small degree 4 Not at all</p>	<p>I am now going to ask you to tell me how accurate are three statements. Each can be somewhat true, or only one or two can be true. To what extent do you feel that your decisions or your actions in _____ [<i>name the domain from the left hand column</i>] are motivated by a desire to avoid punishment or to gain reward?</p>	<p>To what extent do you feel that your decisions or your actions in _____ [<i>name the domain from the left hand column</i>] are motivated by a desire to avoid blame, or so that other people speak well of you?</p>	<p>To what extent do you feel that your decisions or your actions in _____ [<i>name the domain from the left hand column</i>] are motivated byand reflect your own values and/or interests?</p>
Minor Household Expenditures					
Major Household purchases					
Young People’s Education					
Political Decisions ^[1]					
Marriage Choices					
Religious Beliefs ^[2]					
Health Care for family members					
Work and Employment					

'Control over Income'

- Widely used but Limited
- Could be added to the 'Matrix' for direct enquiries about the participant's own earned income

Who mainly decides how any money you earn will be used?

Respondent decides

Spouse decides

Respondent decides jointly with spouse

Someone else decides

Respondent decides jointly someone else

Respondent does not earn any income

Indicator 3: Domain-Specific Autonomy

- Why Domain-Specific Autonomy?
 - Account for Social Pressures
 - Accessing the Respondents' own Values
 - Accounting for change over time
 - Accounting for Psychological Aspects of Empowerment

I am now going to ask you to tell me how accurate are three statements. Each can be somewhat true, or only one or two can be true.

To what extent do you feel that your decisions or your actions in _____ [*name the domain from the left hand column*] are motivated by a desire to avoid punishment or to gain reward?

Scale: 1-4 or 1-6

To what extent do you feel that your decisions or your actions in _____ [*name the domain from the left hand column*] are motivated by a desire to avoid blame, or so that other people speak well of you?

Scale: 1-4 or 1-6

To what extent do you feel that your decisions or your actions in _____ [*name the domain from the left hand column*] are motivated by and reflect your own values and/or interests? Scale: 1-4 or 1-6

Indicator 4: Political Empowerment

- Why Political Empowerment/ Accountability?
 - ‘Holding local institutions accountable’ lies at the heart of the empowerment process
 - Fairness of laws and adequacy of their implementation
 - Limiting elite capture and unequal power relations
 - Assesses the importance of information
 - Promoting state reform and good governance

Political Empowerment

1. Have you ever been dissatisfied with the way that your elected representatives/ local authorities[1] behave?[2]

1 Most of the time

2 Some of the time

3 Rarely

4 Never

5 Would rather not say

6 Don't know

[If possible, specify reason and add code: _____]

Local Regional National

2. Are there ways of holding them accountable?[3]

1 Yes

2 No

3 Would rather not say

[If possible, specify reason and add code: _____]

Local Regional National

3. If yes, have you ever used these?[4]

1 Often

2 Sometimes

3 Never *[Go to question 5]*

4 Would rather not say *[Go to question 5]*

[If possible, specify reason and add code: _____]

Local Regional National

4. If yes, did they work?[5]

1 Yes

2 Some impact

3 Little impact

4 No impact

5 Would rather not say

[If possible, specify reason and add code: _____]

Local Regional National

[1] This category has been modified for countries who do not have elected representatives

[2] Alsop et al (2006): 324

[3] Ibid.: 324

[4] Ibid.: 325

[5] Ibid.: 325

Shorter Question for Testing Local Accountability Systems

Over the past year, have you been in a situation in which you wanted to file a complaint with public authorities because you wanted to (1) complain about the provision or quality of public services (2) claim alimony or file for a divorce, (3) report unfair treatment by local authorities?[\[1\]](#)

1. Did you file any such complaint?

----> If yes, what was the outcome?

----> If no, why not?

- I don't know which type of complaints can be filed//

- I don't know how to file a complaint/

- I was too intimidated to do so[\[2\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) other reasons can be added: for example to complain that you have been unfairly treated by local authorities

[\[2\]](#) Alsop and Heinsohn (2005): 58 from the Mexico Lifelong Learning Project

Conclusion

- Proposing a Shortlist of Empowerment Indicators
- Building on Previous Attempts/ Questionnaires
- Examining the Strengths and Weaknesses of Each indicator
- This is a *Short*-list and hence only 'one' possible way of Measuring Empowerment

Empowerment: **A Missing Dimension of Human Development**

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Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) Conference,
Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford

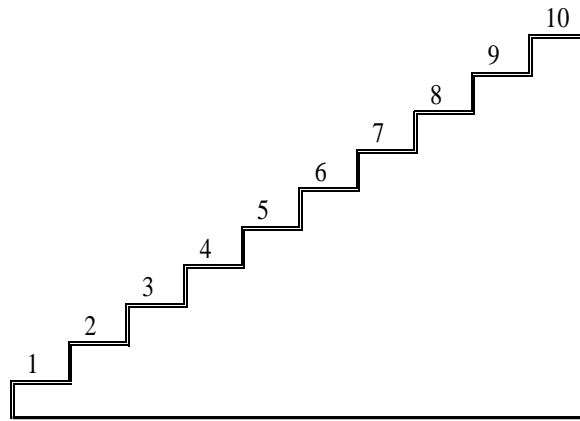
May 2007

Measures of Empowerment

- Self-assessed position on a Ladder of Power and Rights

Imagine a 10-step ladder, where at the bottom, on the first step, stand people who are completely powerless and without rights, and on the highest step, the tenth, stand those who have a lot of power and rights. On which step of this ladder are you today? And on which step were you 10 years ago?

10-Step Ladder (Power and Rights)



Measures of Empowerment

- **Control over personal decision making (current)**

How much control do you feel you have in making personal decisions that affect your everyday activities?

- Control over all decisions..... 1
- Control over most decisions..... 2
- Control over some decisions.....3
- Control over very few decisions.....4
- No control..... 5

- **Control over personal decision making (change)**

Compared to 10 years ago, do you feel that you have now more, less, or about the same amount of control in making personal decisions that affect your everyday activities?

- More..... 1
- About the same..... 2
- Same..... 3

Aspirations

- Aspirations for self

10 Years from now do you expect to be better off, worse off or about the same?

Better off..... 1

About the same..... 2

Worse..... 3

- Aspirations for future generation

Do you think that in the future the next generation will live better, worse, or about the same as you?

Better off..... 1

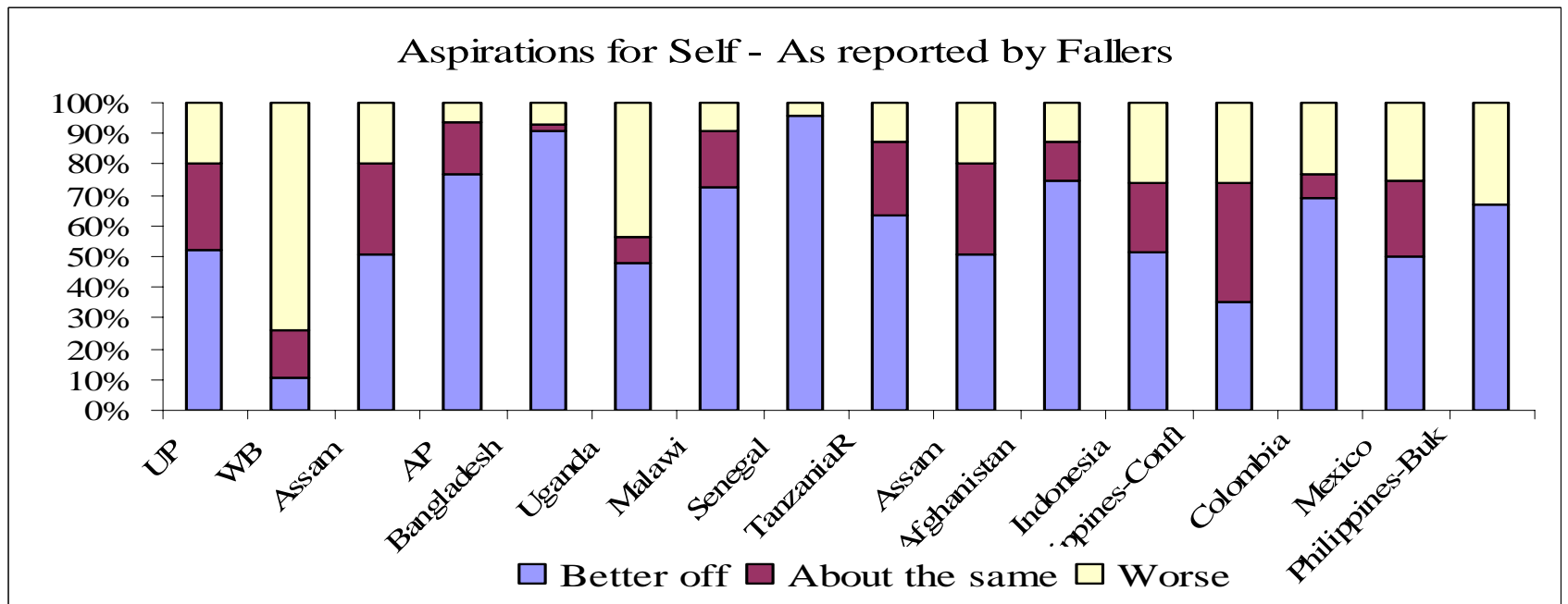
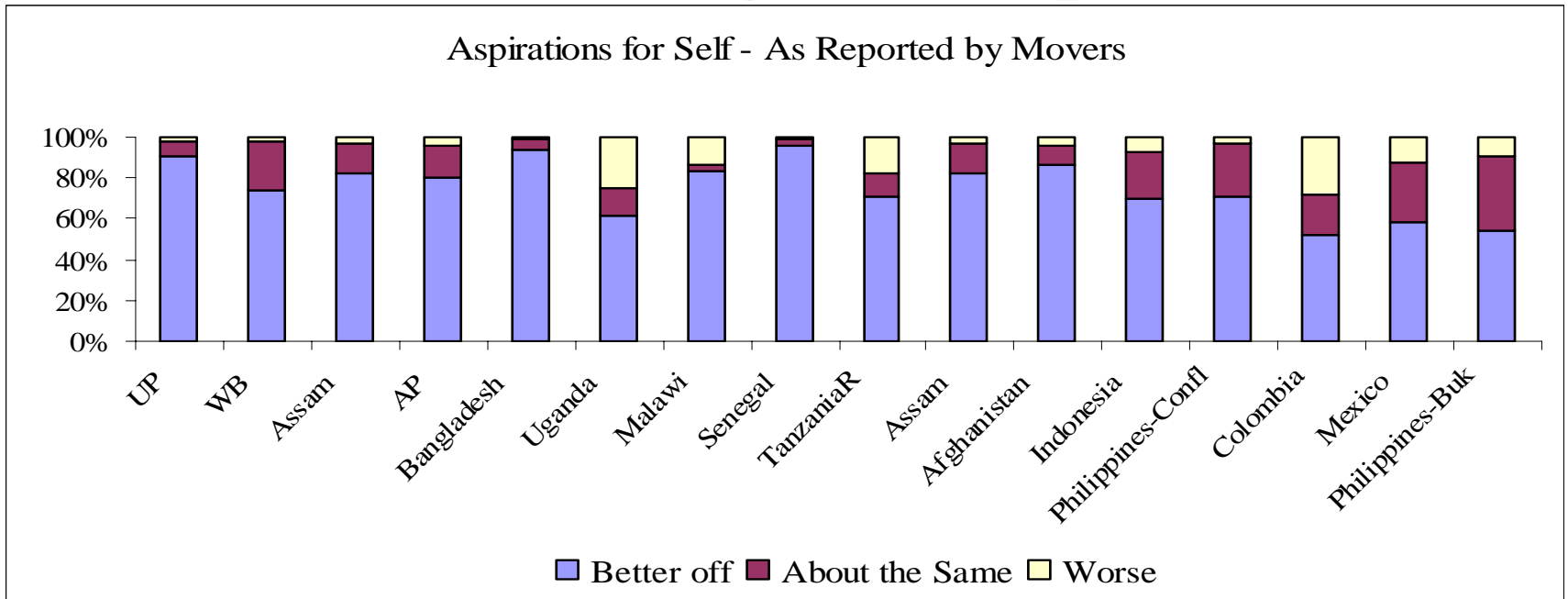
About the same..... 2

Worse..... 3

Average Step by Ladder of Power and Rights: Differences across contexts and groups

	Movers	Fallers	Chronic Poor	Chronic Rich
UP	4.40	2.09	2.23	5.31
WB	4.79	2.48	2.69	5.35
Assam	6.53	5.76	5.19	6.59
AP	3.43	4.33	5.12	4.87
Bangladesh	7.15	6.69	6.61	7.89
Uganda	6.07	6.31	6.93	6.77
Malawi	8.75	8.60	6.47	8.56
Senegal	7.28	6.65	7.26	8.05
TanzaniaR	6.89	5.97	6.59	7.70
Assam	6.53	5.76	5.19	6.59
Afghanistan	9.09	8.00	7.67	8.56
Indonesia	5.39	5.42	5.34	5.90
Philippines-Confl	5.89	4.73	4.80	5.44
Colombia	6.48	6.14	7.27	5.57
Mexico	4.88	3.00	4.48	6.85
Philippines-Buk	5.64	6.00	5.64	6.00
Thailand	5.83	5.60	6.62	6.39

Movers score higher on aspirations

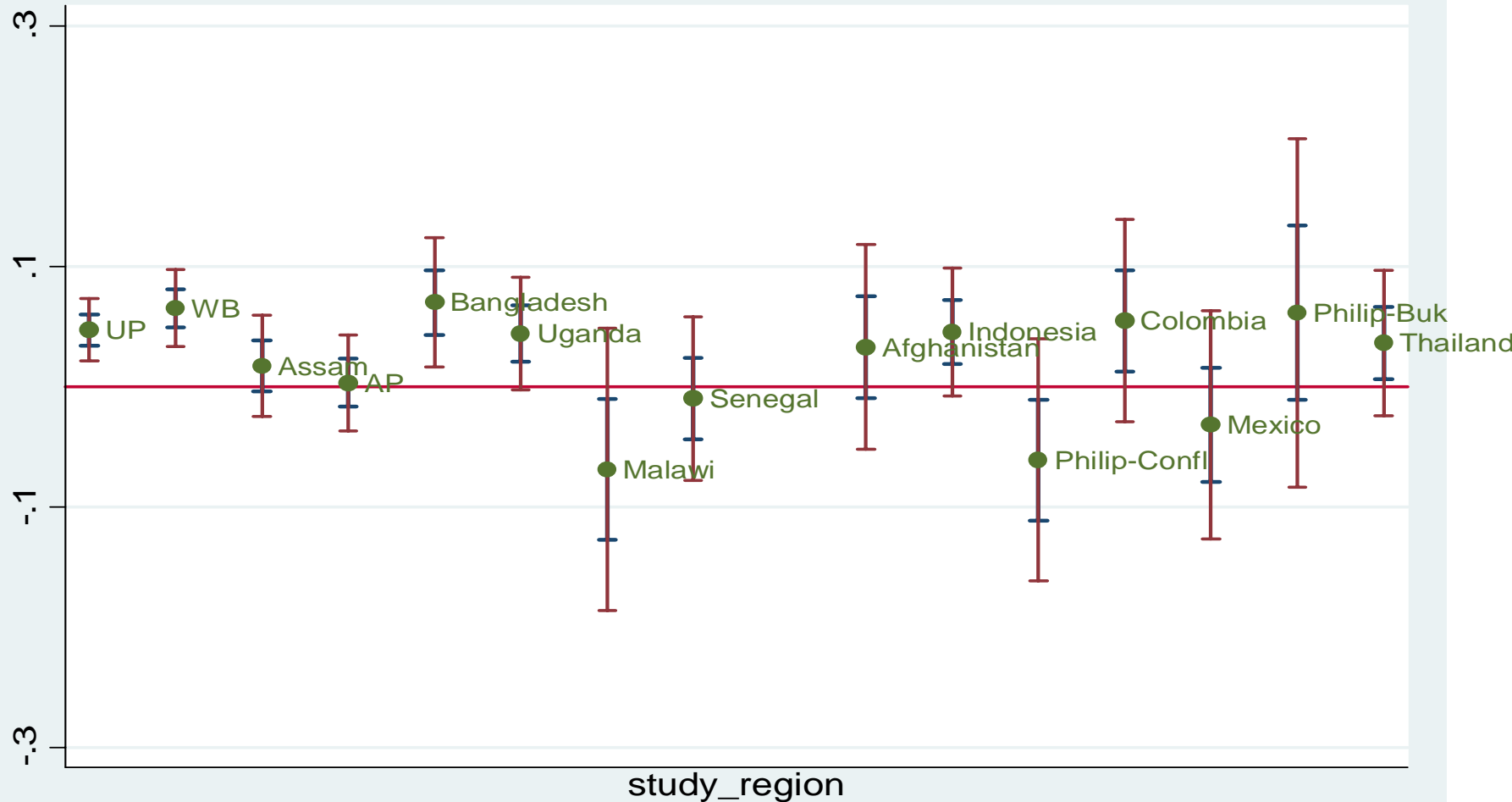


Testing the association of Empowerment with MOP

- The MOP study has been completed primarily in rural areas in 22 different local contexts in 16 countries
- Ran OLS regressions on the quantitative data, using the same conceptual framework and variables across study regions, to unpack the determinants out of poverty
- Basic specification includes variables on economic opportunity, local democracy, collective action, empowerment, aspirations, violence against women and social inequality/divisions. Also included are standard household characteristics
- Caveats
 - 1) People who answered the HH survey aren't representative of the village.
 - 2) Regressions only meant to serve as a data summary device, not to look at causation.
- Regressions were subjected to several torture tests, in addition to cluster correction and tests for robustness.

Movers score higher on Power and Rights/Empowerment

Coeff. and St. Errors: MOP and Empowerment Index



Aspirations too an important correlate of MOP

Coeff. and St. Errors: MOP and Aspirations for the Future

