actionaid

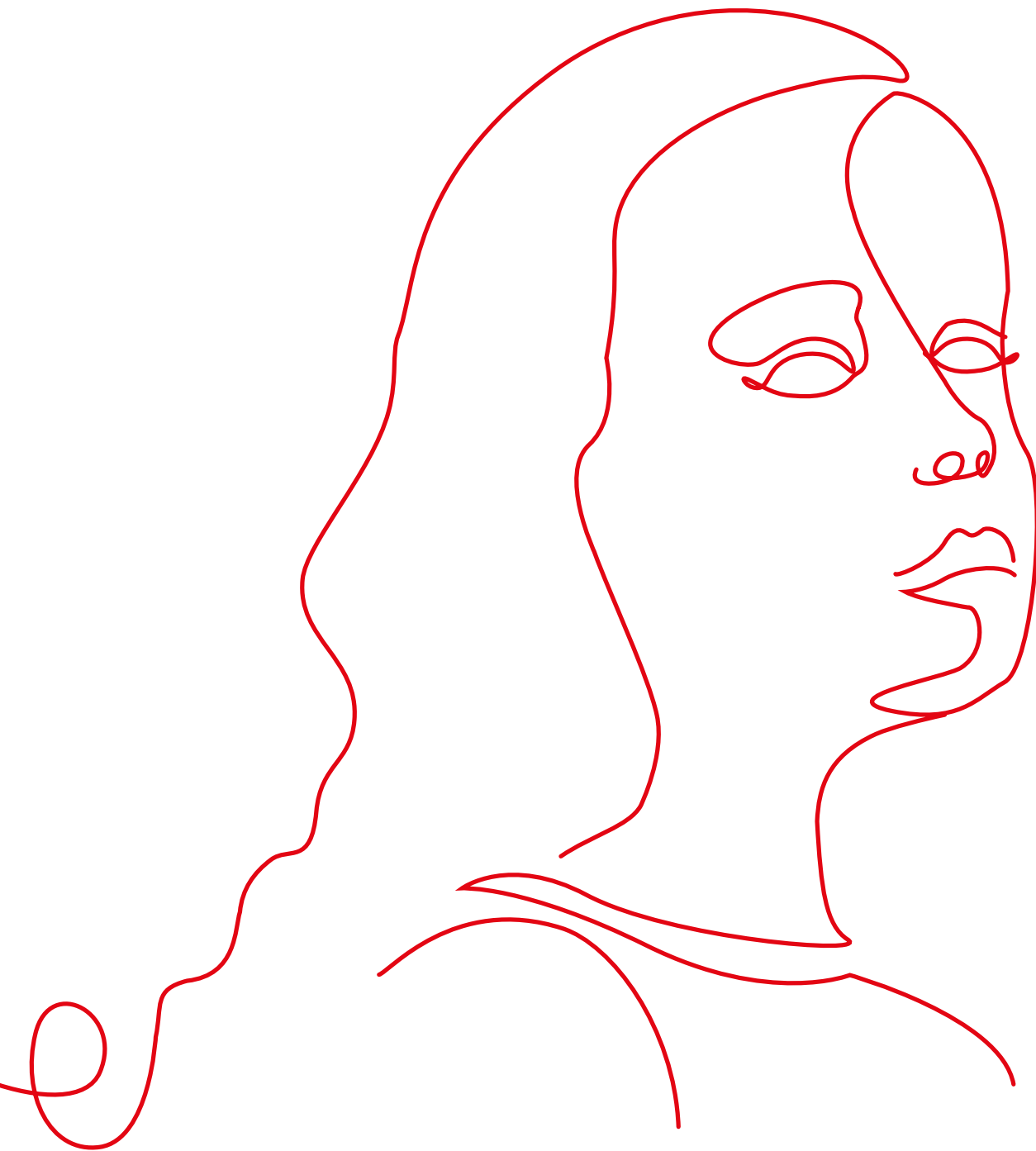## REALIZZA IL CAMBIAMENTO

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Guideline document

Objective

To outline a framework for measuring our empowerment interventions with a particular focus on women survivors of violence.

Target of the document:

This document has a dual value, both internal and external to the organisation. The main internal targets are the colleagues involved in the implementation of projects in the field but also those working to define ActionAid's strategic positioning and communication on the issue. Externally, our priority is to address associations, Third Sector organisations and groups or research centres and academic institutions and scholars working on the subject.

Last but not least, this document is dedicated to all the women ActionAid intercepts with its interventions because we want to ensure that these have a significant impact on their empowerment process.

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FOREWORD

This work stems from the desire to provide ActionAid Italy with a specific framework for the evaluation of women's empowerment. The urgency of the subject is linked to the increasing interventions we carry out in this area. In developing the thoughts and tools proposed in this document we have paid particular attention to measuring the empowerment of women survivors of violence.

A premise is therefore necessary with regard to the choice of the focus on women and the use of the term woman herein.

Why does ActionAid focus its work primarily on women's empowerment? We believe that it is necessary to prioritise women, who pay the highest price for unjust policies and patriarchal societies, and must play a key role in changing unequal gender relations.[1] Focusing our work on women does not just mean recognizing the need to build a fair and just society where women and men can have equal opportunities. It also means recognizing that women are subject to greater discrimination and limitations in the full enjoyment of their rights as we live in a socio-cultural context where patriarchy and capitalism create a mechanism of production and reproduction of roles and norms that generate exploitation and exclusion.

In this regard, in the text, the word "**woman**" will be used in non-binary terms, in full recognition of individual gender identities.

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[1] ActionAid (2017), Action for Global Justice: Strategy 2028, https://ActionAid.org/sites/default/files/strategy_2028_lr.pdf.

1. The theoretical framework of reference: the different theories on empowerment

Although women's empowerment is widely recognised as a goal of global development and poverty reduction policies and strategies, its definition remains an area of challenges and ongoing research for many professionals in the field. In this regard, before presenting our proposal for the conceptualisation and measurement of empowerment, we have reported and summarised some elements of the main theories on empowerment as a starting point for our reflection.

We have favoured theories widely acknowledged and cited in the literature on the subject. In general, the theories selected refer to common or similar key concepts, for example the concept of agency as a form of woman's capacity/ability to make decisions autonomously and to achieve results. Furthermore, as ActionAid is an organisation driven by feminist values that applies an intersectional feminist approach, we have selected those theories that included the theme of power and its manifestations. In this regard, we have favoured theories that allow us to understand the relationship between the individual and social structures, as we interpret inequalities even between genders as a systemic and not purely individual problem.

1.1. A philosophical perspective: the Capability Approach

In order to have an initial understanding of the concept of empowerment, we refer to the *Capability Approach,* a theoretical paradigm proposed by Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen, focused on **what people are really able to do and be**. The two constitutive concepts of the approach are:

» *Functionings,* which represent the results obtained by the individual or the various things that an individual is able to be and do in his or her life[2] Functionings include basic things like being adequately nourished or complex things like being able to take part in the life of one's community;

» *Capabilities,* which represent both "a person's ability to perform actions of value or to achieve valuable states of existence" and "the alternative combinations of things that a person is able to do or be" or the various combinations of functioning (states of being or doing).[3] In this sense, capacity is associated with freedom in the sense of positive freedom to do and be what one wants to do and be, as a real opportunity to obtain the functionings, chosen from as many possibilities.

In this regard, two fundamental concepts of empowerment, namely *"agency"* and *"freedom"* , play a major role in much of the work carried out by Sen[4] The notion of agency freedom is defined as what a person is free to do in order to pursue whatever goal they consider important[5] According to Sen, this form of agency contains both an aspect of opportunity, which mainly concerns our ability to achieve an objective, and an aspect of process, i.e. how such an outcome occurs.

Martha Nussbaum takes up and, to a certain extent, goes beyond Sen's Capability Approach through the elaboration of a universalistic (open and revisable) list of fundamental human capabilities. In her proposal she claims that these should be "the basis for the elaboration of fundamental constitutional principles", i.e. principles which should be respected by the governments of all nations, and which can be claimed by all citizens.[6] This list includes: life, health, physical integrity, feelings, practical reason, belonging, being able to live with other species taking care of them, playing, controlling one's own political and material environment (participation, private property, work and justice). Each of these capabilities presupposes the idea of a minimum level threshold, i.e. a level below which citizens are unable to achieve true human functioning.

1.2. A sociological perspective: the Structuration Theory

An important starting point for understanding the reflections on empowerment is also offered to us by sociology and in particular by the *Structuration Theory* developed by English sociologist Anthony Giddens.[7] The central point of this theory is the relationship between individual actions and structures and it allows us to understand empowerment as a process made of connections between the agent/subject and structures. According to this theory, individual actions are limited by structures, but in the same way they are also carriers of

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[2] Sen, A. (1995). Inequality reexamined. New Delhi: Oxford University Press

[3] Sen, A. (1993). Capability and well-being. In Martha Nussbaum & Amartya Sen (Eds.), Quality of Life. Oxford: Clarendon Press

[4] Keleher, L. (2014). Sen and Nussbaum: Agency and Capability Expansion. Éthique et économique/Ethics and Economics, 11 (2).

[5] Sen, A. (1985). Well-being Agency and Freedom. Journal of Philosophy 1985: 203

[6] Nussbaum, M. (2000). *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (The Seeley Lectures). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[7] Giddens, A. (1984) The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration. University of California Press, Berkeley.

social change, acting on these structures and modifying them. In this relationship, structures impose constraints on actions but at the same time make them possible and therefore the two elements cannot be understood separately from each other but must be studied together. Society is therefore interpreted as a social construction created and maintained by social practices, i.e. the actions of the individuals of whom it consists.

An important element of this theory is the question of the person's awareness of the relationship between their actions and the structures. In this regard, the structuration theory allows us to have a broad understanding of human action in which individuals are aware, powerful and able to change social structures through their action, which is very useful for the conceptualisation of the empowerment process.[8]

1.3. A psychological perspective: the Theory of Self-determination and subjective well-being

With respect to sociology, the analyses developed by psychology on the topic of empowerment have often focused on the perspective of individual empowerment.[9] An interesting example in this area is the *Theory of self-determination*, formalised in the 1980s,[10] which explains the mechanisms or behaviours underlying the natural inclination of all individuals to determine their own future freely and independently on the basis of their personal mix of knowledge, skills and beliefs. According to this theory, the well-being of an individual is the result of the fulfilment of three basic psychological needs:

» *Need for competence*, i.e. the ability to exercise control over the results of one's own actions and experiencing the possession of skills;

» *need for autonomy*, a universal impulse to be causal agents of one's own life and to act in harmony with one's integrated self, which is different from the need for independence from others, which indeed falls within the sphere of relationality;

» *Need for relationships*, i.e. the development and maintenance of personal relationships.

The theory analyses the factors that promote motivation, which in turn influences the actions of the individual

and thus the satisfaction of the needs listed above. This motivation can be either intrinsic (satisfaction born from the behaviour itself) or extrinsic (given by social or cultural conditions, instrumental, aiming at results independent from the behaviour itself). Although self-determination does not correspond perfectly to empowerment, it is an important sub-dimension.

More recently, on the other hand, psychology has also widened its focus on the theme of empowerment, analysing it on an individual, family, organisational and community level, inviting us not to ignore the contextual factors that influence empowerment itself.[11] In particular, **individual** empowerment has been defined as a multi-level construct that integrates the perception of personal control, a proactive approach to life and a critical understanding of the socio-political environment; **organisational** empowerment involves working with others to become effective as a group of activists; finally, at a higher level, **community** empowerment refers to individuals working together in an organised way to improve their collective lives and the links between the organisations and community agencies that contribute to quality of life[12]. The community dimension therefore falls both into the empowerment sphere of the individual and as a domain in its own right.

1.4. The feminist approach

The conception of empowerment as a process of acquisition and redistribution of power in its various forms that is opposed to forms of domination is key to the feminist approach.

One example of this is the definition of empowerment given by Jill M. Bystydzienski: "Empowerment is [...] a process by which oppressed people gain some control over their lives by participating with others in the development of activities and structures that enable people to become more involved in issues that directly affect them. In its course people become able to govern themselves effectively. This process implies the use of power, but not "power over others" or power as domination as is traditionally the case; rather, power is seen as "power towards" or power as competence generated and shared by the dispossessed when they begin to shape the content and structure of their daily existence and thus participate in a movement for social change".[13]

[8] Wheeler-Brooks, J. (2009). "Structuration Theory and Critical Consciousness: Potential Applications for Social Work Practice," The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare: Vol. 36 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.
[9] Some of the analyses originating in this area concern the concept of empowerment in working and motivational contexts, but these will not be addressed here.
[10] Officialised in the 80's by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci (Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being).
[11] Zimmerman, M. A. (2000). *Empowerment theory: Psychological, organizational, and community levels of analysis.* In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Handbook of community psychology.* Kluwer Academic Publishers.
[12] Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). "Psychological empowerment: Issues and illustrations." American Journal of Community Psychology 23(5): 581-599.
[13] Bystydzienski J.M. (1992) quoted in Yuval-Davis, N. (1994): "Women, Ethnicity and Empowerment", in Feminism & Psychology 4 (1), 179-197.

In the same sense, according to Batliwala, empowerment **can be understood both as a process and as the result of a process of transformation of power relations between individuals and social groups leading to the redistribution of power between genders.**[14] **Female empowerment therefore involves the following elements**[15]**:**

» challenging the patriarchal ideology (male domination and female role of subordination);

» transforming the structures and institutions that reinforce gender discrimination and social inequalities (family, caste, class, religion, educational processes and institutions, media, health practices, laws and civil codes, political processes, development models);

» enabling poor women to have access to and control material and information resources.

In this sense, Rowlands also stresses the importance of understanding and analysing the different forms of power and how they interact, to truly understand empowerment. In addition, Rowlands identifies three dimensions in which it is operational: **personal, close relationship and collective.**[16] **Personal empowerment** involves "the development of a sense of self-confidence, capable of nullifying the effects of internalised oppression". **Empowerment of close relationship** includes the ability to negotiate; ability to communicate; ability to obtain support; self-organization and management; ability to defend one's rights, sense of "self" in the relationship and dignity. Finally, **collective empowerment** is the result of the action of a group of women, whose fundamental elements include: sense of collective agency; self-organization and management; group identity; group dignity.

In conclusion, the feminist approach to which the transnational feminist network DAWN has largely contributed since the mid-1980s is characterized by a strongly political approach to empowerment based on the awareness that equality for women is impossible within the current economic, political and cultural context, where processes that reserve resources, power and control to small groups of people are dominant.[17]

1.5. The regulatory framework: empowerment of women survivors of violence and gender equality

Within the international regulatory framework, the concept of empowerment is used in various conventions, resolutions and documents. In particular, the concept of empowerment has been present in international soft law documents of the **United Nations** since the early 1990s[18] Also since the 1990s, the **Council of Europe** has undertaken several actions to promote the empowerment of women as a form of protection against violence, which materialised in 2002 with the approval of the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Protection of Women from Violence[19] and in 2011 with the adoption of the Istanbul Convention[20]

The concept of empowerment is also present in **Agenda 2030** where it is related to the achievement of gender equality (SDG no. 5).[21] In this way, the empowerment of all women and girls*,* an essential condition for a prosperous and sustainable world, becomes a fundamental objective to be achieved in all areas of life and at all levels.

Even within the **European legislation**, the concept of empowerment is closely linked to the achievement of gender equality.[22] It is in fact repeatedly referred to in the **European Commission**'s strategic documents which aim to achieve gender equality and link the socio-economic empowerment of women to the goal of eliminating violence against women and girls and ensuring respect for their rights.[23] The work of the **European Parliament** on this issue is also significant,

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[14] Batliwala, S., Asian-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, & Freedom from Hunger Campaign, Action for Development. (1993). *Empowerment of women in South Asia: Concepts and practices*. New Delhi, India: FFHC/AD Programme Officer.

[15] Batliwala, S. (1994): "The Meaning of Women's Empowerment: New Concepts from Action", in Gita Sen, Adrienne Germain and Lincoln C. Chen (eds.), Population Policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment, and Rights, Boston: Harvard University Press, 127-138.

[16] Rowlands, J. (1998). A Word of the Times, but What Does it Mean? Empowerment in the Discourse and Practice of Development. In: Afshar H. (eds) Women and Empowerment. Women's Studies at York. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

[17] 13 Sen G., Grown C. (1987). Development Crises and Alternative Visions. London: Routledge, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315070179.

[18] Cfr. UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1992). CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19: Violence against women, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/52d920c54.html. Un Women, ⬜HYPERLINK "https://beijing20.unwomen.org/~/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf"Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, (1995), section D e F.

[19] Council of Europe Committee of ministers, Recommendation Rec(2002)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the protection of women against violence, adopted on 30 April 2002, General measures concerning violence against women, par 2, letter b.

[20] Council of Europe, Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, Istanbul, 11 May 2011, Art.18 para.3.

[21] The sub-targets include the elimination of all forms of discrimination, abusive practices and violence against women and girls, the recognition and enhancement of care and domestic work, the full participation of women and equal leadership opportunities at all levels of decision-making.

[22] Numerous documents have been produced on the subject by the European Commission, including various directives adopted to guide the action of States in this area. One example is *DIRECTIVE 2010/41/EU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 7 July 2010 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC.*

[23] The *Gender Action Plan II* recognises the *economic empowerment (*emancipation) *of women* as of the priority areas of action. The documents *Strategic engagement for gender equality 2010-2015 and 2016-2019* aim to increase women's participation in the labour market, and consequently their economic

as it regularly promotes initiatives aimed at achieving gender equality and has a standing committee dedicated to women's rights and gender equality. In particular, the Parliament is very active on the issue of gender equality at work as demonstrated by the 2017 Resolution on women's economic empowerment in the public and private sector in the EU.[24] However, despite the efforts of the Commission and Parliament, the European Union has not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention. This is due to the emergence of reactionary positions on the issue of women's rights in several European states.

On the other hand, although the **Italian State** ratified the Istanbul Convention as early as 2014, it has not yet fully defined and regulated the concept of empowerment in national legislation. A reference to this concept was introduced in two policy documents to combat violence against women, which have unfortunately been followed by poor operational provisions.[25]

Finally, many **Regions** have intervened on their legislation in this area by introducing or strengthening measures to promote the socio-economic empowerment of women who have suffered violence. 17 out of 20 regions have introduced a reference in their policies to the importance of promoting women's empowerment and reintegration into the labour market. However, only 11 of these have also introduced financial provisions,[26] while the rest provide for the financing of these interventions through state, European or one-off allocations. Finally, the Emilia-Romagna Region alone has included a definition of the concept of empowerment in the 2015 Anti-Violence Plan, defining it as a "process designed to modify power relations in the different contexts of social and personal life, aimed in particular at ensuring that women are listened to, that their experiences are recognised, and that they can participate in decision-making processes in the political, economic and social spheres".[27]

independence, and the need to fight against gender-based violence, protecting and supporting those who suffer violence. Also in the *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025* the socio-economic empowerment of women is reproposed as a necessary action to contribute to the elimination of violence against women and girls and to ensure respect for their human, political and civil rights. This last objective will also inform the *Gender Action Plan III* to be published in the second half of 2020, which will focus in particular on the European Union's external action on gender equality.

[24] European Parliament, *Economic empowerment of women in the public and private sectors in the EU,* Strasbourg 3 October 2017, Approved text P8_TA(2017)0364.

[25] The *Extraordinary Plan of Action against violence against women* of 2015 included *Social and Working Reintegration* among its lines of action and proposed *guidelines for an integrated model of intervention aimed at the social and working reintegration of female victims of violence* in order to **encourage the stipulation of territorial agreements and/or conventions between all the actors involved** in support of social and working reintegration, while the *National Strategic Plan on male violence against* women of 2017 introduced the **need to activate economic, financial, work and housing empowerment paths** as one of its priorities.

[26] For example: provision of annual regional funding, establishment of ad hoc funds, introduction of provisions such as the income of freedom (Sardinia and Sicily) which provides for the stipulation of a pact between the Region and the woman who has suffered violence through which the beneficiary, in exchange for the support guaranteed by the Region, undertakes to participate in a personalised project aimed at acquiring or regaining her personal, social and economic autonomy and independence.

[27] See Legislative Assembly of the Emilia-Romagna Region, Regional plan against gender-based violence pursuant to art. 17 of Regional Law no. 6 of 27 June 2014. (Proposal of the Regional Council dated 29 February 2016, no. 291). (Prot. DOC/2016/0000297 of 05/05/2016), p.28.

2. From theory to practice: programmes, projects and measurement frameworks

In addition to the theoretical perspective related to the conceptualisation of empowerment, to reason on its measurement, it is also essential to look at how women's empowerment has been and is being applied in the practices of international, national and civil society organisations that have financed or implemented projects for its promotion over the years. We have chosen, in a representative and non-exhaustive manner, both organisations specialising in the subject and organisations that implement ad hoc programmes or have integrated the subject into broader interventions for poverty reduction or economic development.

2.1. Empowerment in international programmes

At **international level**, one of the major promoters of gender equality programmes and women's empowerment is certainly **UN Women**, which acts in several priority areas, including economic empowerment. In this regard, it has drawn up, in collaboration with United Nations Global Compact (UN Global Compact), the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEP) which offer guidance to businesses on how to promote gender equality and empower women in the workplace, in the market and in the community.[28] Gender equality is also at the heart of the **World Bank** Group's objectives to combat extreme poverty and promote shared prosperity, which focuses on the following dimensions: a) closing remaining gender gaps in education and health in countries where they persist, b) removing the constraints on more and better jobs for women, c) removing barriers to women's ownership and control over resources (land, housing, etc.), d) increasing women's voice and action.[29]

Also at international level, the analyses carried out by the **OECD**, which traces the bilateral aid of member states whose main (primary) or significant (secondary) policy objective is gender equality and women's empowerment, are interesting.[30] The OECD, in a recent policy paper, also discusses the measurement of women's empowerment through data on time use (particularly focusing on unpaid care work) and gender inequality.[31]

Within the **European programming**, several funding lines have supported projects for the empowerment of women and its measurement as a way of evaluating the effectiveness of the interventions. The REC programme of DG Justice **(Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme)** had, among its objectives, the promotion of equality between women and men, gender mainstreaming and the prevention of violence against women.[32] **Erasmus+** has also funded empowerment projects, in particular by mobilising young women, facilitating access to training and entry into the world of work.[33] The thematic priorities of **EuropeAid** including translating Agenda 2030 into concrete actions (i) the physical and psychological integrity of women and girls, (ii) the rights and socio-economic empowerment of women and girls, (iii) the voice and participation of women and girls. Finally, within the **Horizon 2020** programme, gender is a cross-cutting issue and a more integrated approach to research and innovation is promoted.

At national level, the **Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)** has made significant progress in recent years in the field of gender equality and empowerment by addressing gender issues across all initiatives and programmes developed by providing a growing number of reference points on gender issues in its foreign offices and by adopting the Guidelines for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2010), which are currently being updated. Finally, in the AICS-DGCS Plan for the effectiveness of the 2020-2022 interventions, the Italian Cooperation proposes to measure the application of the principle of "leaving no one behind" through two main results, including one linked to the 'increased percentage of disbursements for programmes in favour of gender equality' (gender equality and women's empowerment).

In addition to ActionAid, which we will discuss in the next paragraph, the **civil society organisations** that have gone more deeply into the concept of empowerment have included CARE and Oxfam. In 2005, **CARE** developed an empowerment analysis

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[28] UN WOMEN (2011) Women's empowerment principles. Equality Means Business https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2011/10/women-s-empowerment-principles_en%20pdf.pdf?la=en&vs=1504.

[29] World Bank Group (2015). World Bank Group Gender Strategy (FY16-23): Gender Equality, Poverty Reduction and Inclusive Growth. World Bank, Washington, DC.

[30] OECD (2018). Aid to gender equality and women's empowerment: An Overview. http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/aidinsupportofgenderequalityandwomensempowerment.htm

[31] OECD (2019) Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment. Time Use Data and Gender Inequality. OECD DEVELOPMENT POLICY PAPERS No. 16 https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/MEASURING-WOMENS-ECONOMIC-EMPOWERMENT-Gender-Policy-Paper-No-16.pdf.

[32] In the new European financial framework, the programme will become "Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme".

[33] European Commission (2019), 10 Erasmus+ projects that empower women. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/news/10-erasmus-projects-empower-women_cs

and measurement framework[34] to assess the impact of its programmes, which has also been tested in humanitarian interventions since 2019.[35] The concept of empowerment for CARE includes both the process (building capacity) and the result (outcome) and is broken down into three interconnected dimensions: agency, relationships and structures. For each of these dimensions, CARE also identified a list of mostly qualitative sub-dimensions and indicators. In contrast, **Oxfam** has developed a specialised framework for measuring economic empowerment (WEE). This framework focuses on women's ability to access and control productive resources and to be recognised as economic actors. For Oxfam, there is "effective economic empowerment when women enjoy their rights of control, and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, and when they have the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and well-being. For this to happen, individual empowerment is also needed, so that women have autonomy and confidence in the change they can bring to their lives, including the power to organise and influence decision making, enjoying equal rights to those of men and free from violence".[36] The main dimensions that Oxfam, borrowing from the Care system, mentions in the impact analyses related to women's empowerment are: the ability to make decisions and influence; self-perception; personal freedom; access to and control of resources; support of social networks.

2.2. Measuring empowerment: examples of global indices and indicators

The multidimensional and dynamic nature of the concept of empowerment, the need to contextualise its meaning with respect to the reference territory/group, along with the need to keep the intersectional perspective together, make us understand how the different efforts to make it operational and validate its dimensions have had to and must still face challenges. Despite this level of complexity, indicators and indices have been proposed by the main international players to measure the empowerment of women, and these have also been used as the basis for our attempt at categorisation and measurement.

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[34] CARE International (2006). Global Research Framework, Women's Empowerment Strategic Impact Inquiry.

[35] CARE (2020).Strategic Impact Inquiry on Gender in Emergencies Phase Two: Initial Steps & Ways to Contribute. https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/in-practice/impact-inquiry-on-gender-in-emergencies#:~:text=CARE's%20first%20Strategic%20Impact%20Inquiry,designs%20across%20the%20CARE%20world.

[36] Oxfam (2017). Oxfam's Conceptual Framework on Women's Economic Empowerment, https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620269/gt-framework-womens-economicempowerment-180118-en.pdf;jsessionid=4AA4BDCBE1E57BA4573457102CDEEFC2?sequence=7.

TABLE 1. **global indices and indicators**

	Author/ Organisa- tion	Year	Description	Main dimensions/ indicators	Measurement level
Gender Development Index (GDI)	UNDP	1995	It measures gender equality and focuses on gender gaps in achieving the 3 Human Development Index (HDI) indicators: life expectancy, education and income.	• Life expectancy • Education • Income	National
Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)	UNDP	1995	It measures whether women and men are able to participate actively in economic and political life and take part in decision-making processes.	• Political participation • Economic participation and decision-making power • Income	National
Gender Inequality Index (GII)	UNDP	2010	It proposes a composite measure for quantifying the percentage of human development potential lost due to gender inequality. This index aims to overcome both the methodological and conceptual limits attributed to the previous GDI and GEM indicators.	• Reproductive health • Empowerment • Participation in the labour market	National
Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)	International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Oxford Poverty, Human Development Initiative, (OPHI) USAID, Feed the Future	2012	It is an indicator consisting of two sub-indicators measuring respectively the empowerment of women in five agriculture-related domains and gender equality within the family group. Results at household level.	• Decisions on agricultural production • Access to and decision-making power over productive resources • Control of income use • Leadership in the community • Time allocation	Household
Women's Empowerment Index (WEI)	The Hunger Project	2015	It measures progress in the multidimensional aspects of women's empowerment by considering it both as a factor of women's achievements and of gender equality with men (Gender parity ratio). Aggregate results at community level.	• Agency • Income • Leadership • Resources • Time	Community

3. Women's empowerment for ActionAid: towards a new conceptualisation and measurement

3.1. Introduction

ActionAid Italy, which has been involved for several years in interventions and projects on the theme of women's empowerment at international and national level (see chapter 4) and in line with the efforts made also by other Third Sector organisations such as Care and Oxfam, recognises the importance and the need to have a framework for measuring empowerment that is applicable across several projects in order to give an overall view of the organisation's impact on the theme.

In our proposal to conceptualize empowerment, we start from some assumptions related to our approach as International Federation of ActionAid,[37] or rather:

» "Women pay the highest price for unjust policies and patriarchal societies, so they must play a key role in transforming unfair gender relations. In this regard, we have decided to start from the empowerment of women in our efforts to assess the impact of our interventions;

» "We work to address intersecting inequalities in terms of gender, income, location, disability, age, race, caste, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and gender identity that exacerbate poverty and exclusion. We have therefore also taken intersectionality into account in our conceptualisation of empowerment[38]

» "Change is not linear and opportunities are opening up to drive social change. Promoting alternatives and resisting injustice at different times and in different contexts require different strategies. Empowerment, like any process of change, is a non-linear process in which we must inevitably anticipate delays and setbacks. Furthermore, it is important to try to adapt empowerment promotion strategies to respond to different contexts and contingent opportunities;

We therefore present in this third chapter, a proposal for the conceptualisation and measurement of women's empowerment which, starting from the assumptions just described, takes up and adapts various theories and definitions presented in the previous paragraphs. These include, for example, Sen's capability approach, which emphasises the individual's ability to choose functions that are of value to her/him; the conception of empowerment as a process and the result of Batliwala's redistribution of power or Giddens' structuration theory, which explains the interaction between individual and environment/structures.

Following on from these premises, we define empowerment as: *a progressive multidimensional process in which a woman or a group of women acquires power and is able to make significant choices for herself and for others in the personal, social, political and economic domains. On a transformative level, this translates into a change in power relations between genders both in interpersonal relationships and at the collective level.*

3.2. Units of analysis: individual and collective empowerment

In this definition of empowerment, we recognise the existence of different units of analysis that interact in the process of empowerment, that is:

» Individual: the single woman;

» Collective: plurality of people considered as a whole (e.g. plurality of women). The term collective is used in the document in reference to the process of empowerment as a synonym of community, i.e. a group of people "acting reciprocally and towards others, not belonging to the community itself, more or less consciously putting the values, norms, customs, interests of the community, considered as a whole, before those of their own sub-group or other communities".[39] However, this does not exclude the impact of empowerment on other members of the community, interpreted as a "community of place", i.e. a group of people united by living in the same place (city, region, country).

In this regard, in our programmes and projects we work both individually with people and collectively with communities, groups and movements. At the individual level, we intervene to strengthen people's agency, so that they are more aware of their rights and equipped with the tools to make responsible decisions and participate in choices that directly and indirectly affect them. On a collective level, we work with individual groups set up to share tools and methodologies that

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[37] ActionAid (2017). Action for Global Justice: Strategy 2028, https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/strategy_2028_lr.pdf.
[38] To learn more about intersectionality https://www.ingenere.it/articoli/di-cosa-parliamo-quando-parliamo-di-intersezionalita.
[39] Gallino, L. (1993). Dizionario di sociologia.

contribute to their ability to work towards the goals they have set themselves.

Working on both individual and collective empowerment does not mean being unaware that the two processes do not always coincide. In fact, we acknowledge that the empowerment of a group can sometimes increase or decrease in inverse proportion to the individual's empowerment, or even be independent of it. Collective empowerment can limit individual empowerment when the objectives of the two processes are not aligned and the group exerts pressure on the individual to subordinate his or her own interests to the collective ones. On the other hand, individual empowerment can only increase collective empowerment if there are positive relationships between group members and when the group manages to aggregate and catalyse the capacities of individuals.

Nevertheless, starting from the recognition that we live in a world of inequalities caused by powerful and interconnected global forces, we believe that solutions can only be found through collective and connected efforts at community, national and global level. In this sense, we work to build collective power through broad alliances between communities, people's organizations, social movements and other allies.[40]

3.3. The domains of the empowerment process

In our conceptualisation, we refer to a concept of empowerment that takes place in different domains of a person's personal and community life. In particular, in light of the type of our programmes and projects, we consider 4 main domains:

» Personal: this concerns, for example, the choices that the woman makes for herself and within her own household

» Social: this concerns shared choices, or those that have an effect on other people and members of the community

» Economic: this concerns choices related to areas such as work, access to credit, etc.

» Political: this concerns choices related to justice, political participation, etc.

In this regard, it is important to stress that the degree of empowerment that characterises one domain can be different from that experienced in another, and it is important to understand the relationships between the different degrees of empowerment that the woman experiences in each domain because they can influence

each other. For example, if a woman has little decision-making power within the family (personal domain) in terms of which job to choose, she will also tend to have a low degree of empowerment within the economic domain.

Defining empowerment in one of these domains as the objective of an intervention does not mean not recognising the multidimensionality of the concept of empowerment itself, but rather focusing the intervention while maintaining an approach that is as comprehensive as possible. Therefore, in cases where explicit reference is made, for example, to economic empowerment, it should be understood as a process pertaining to a specific domain, bearing in mind, however, how the different dimensions influence each other.

3.4. Forms of power

When adopting a feminist approach in our conceptualisation of empowerment we cannot disregard an in-depth analysis of the forms of power and how they change and are redistributed during and as a result of the empowerment process. Since power is at the basis of every human relationship and the organisation of society, it also has a role to play within the process of empowerment. The starting point is therefore the recognition that power permeates the spaces in which we act and live and that it can be expressed in different ways[41]:

» **Power in** the inner personal sphere is related to the perception of being able to control one's own decisions and actions and to feeling effective. Personal resources, such as one's own knowledge, access to information but also contacts, and a support network, can help to increase power in;

» **Power with** which is linked to the dimension of relationships. It is the collective power of groups, from support for a cause to actions to fight the most revolutionary injustices;

» **Power of** which is about the ability to act for oneself or for others to achieve a personal, collective or political goal;

» **Power over** which concerns who decides what and is expressed as direct or indirect control over other people, making decisions about their opportunities, choices and actions. This concept tends to be negative and translate into forms of domination that unjustly limit the individual or collective power of women;

» **Power under** is a form of power exercised mainly and often subconsciously by people who have experienced discrimination, abuse, oppression and trauma, and who in turn can become authoritarian

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40 ActionAid International (2017), Action for Global Justice: Strategy 2028, https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/strategy_2028_lr.pdf.
41 Batliwala, S. (2019), All About Power: Understanding Social Power & Power Structures, CREA.

and oppressive as they acquire power (formal or informal).

These forms of power can be manifested in different ways, some of which are easier to see and recognise:

» **Visible** is that which we see working every day in both public and private spaces. In public spaces it is linked to the formally recognised position and authority of a person or institution and translates into the ability to control people's choices, access to resources, participation in decision-making processes, and to structure the rules that guide societies and govern countries. In private spaces it operates in a similar way, but arises from social norms and habits, for example from the different roles attributed to women or men within the family that determine who has control over who and what.

» **Hidden or indirect** this indicates the ability to influence people's opportunities, access to resources and rights indirectly, without having formal power and without being visible. In public spaces it operates at the level of political leaders, religious leaders or even influential personalities in other spheres, and in company organisations, and networks of various kinds. In private spaces, it operates in the reproduction of gender stereotypes.

» **Invisible** this is the power to influence how people think and feel about themselves, it is the force that creates social attitudes and prejudices and influences our desires and needs. Examples of this are ideologies, but also media, advertising, etc.

3.5. The steps of the empowerment process

In our proposal, empowerment is seen as a process consisting of several phases in which the forces in play and their interactions change, producing changes of different levels.

» **Potential empowerment:** this is the initial phase of the process and it corresponds to the **strengthening of those preconditions that are necessary for action, i.e. resources, skills and self-awareness (sense of agency)**. Potential empowerment coincides with the individual woman or group of women's recognition of their potential as agents **(power in)** and it is linked to the concept of self-empowerment. A change in this phase is measurable in the short term.

Potential empowerment is followed by two forms of empowerment: primary and transformative (micro and macro).[42]

» **Primary empowerment:** this is the phase of the process that takes place when **the woman (or group of women) makes significant choices but within the existing structures and power relations**. This type of empowerment refers to acting within roles and responsibilities already assigned and defined without questioning them. In this sense, the woman/group can increase the effectiveness of her action, thus increasing her **power of**, but not opposing the **power over** that the structures exercise. A change in this phase is measurable in the short to medium term.

» **Micro-transformative empowerment:** this is the phase of the process that takes place when **the woman (or group of women) makes significant choices by questioning the existing power relations (power over and power under)** in socializing agencies at micro level (e.g. peer-to-peer, family, and work, educational). It takes place in the medium term and has an impact on the individual woman, or on a limited group of which she is a member.

» **Macro-transformative empowerment:** this is the stage of the process that takes place when **the woman (or group of women) uses her power to achieve a collective change that questions the redistribution of power** in socialising agencies at macro level (e.g. political, economic institutions). Macro-transformative empowerment is not limited to combating immediate forms of inequality, but initiates long-term processes of change in social structures. It is implemented in the long term and has an impact on a large community (community of place).

We propose some practical examples to help identify the different stages of the empowerment process. By choosing the theme of care work, potential empowerment is realised when the individual woman becomes aware of the injustice that exists in the different allocation of care tasks between women and men. Primary empowerment enables the woman to act to reconcile paid work, care work and personal interests within existing opportunities. Micro-transformative empowerment takes place when women question the allocation of the tasks in their households by increasing the participation of men in the performance of care tasks traditionally attributed to women, whereas macro-transformative empowerment aims at recognising the economic value of care work at national level, for example, and can be translated into a law regulating, for example, the acquisition of employment contributions for the performance of certain care tasks. In interventions to contrast gender stereotypes, potential empowerment is realised when the woman becomes aware of the existence of stereotypes and the consequences they have on her choices. In primary empowerment the woman does not reproduce stereotypes in her choices. Micro-transformative empowerment can result in the

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[42] Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal. *Gender and Development, 13*(1), 13 24. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20053132.

liberation of some spaces from stereotypes (e.g. a single school), and macro-transformative empowerment aims instead at a transformation at national level, for example in changing the language of the media.

In this sense, our task as ActionAid Italy is to integrate actions carried out to promote the empowerment of individual women (e.g. actions designed to develop their capacity, sense of self-efficacy, self-confidence, or micro-transformative actions such as escaping from a violent relationship), actions of aggregation of interests and collective demands for change and programmatic actions that modify structures to reduce their oppositional force to change (e.g. macro-transformative actions such as ensuring economic recognition of care work, including modules against stereotypes in school curricula at national level). Bringing conceptualisation back to the practice of working against gender-based violence means taking a stand against what we consider to be *unfair structures*.[43] Working to change these structures means both taking direct advocacy action to promote more effective, integrated and gender sensitive policies, and countering stereotypes and fostering collective awareness of patriarchal structures through awareness-raising and training activities, which, of course, promote the empowerment of individual women, including support for escaping violence.

Therefore, ActionAid intervenes in primary empowerment actions also by providing specific resources and services to the individual woman, but always with the aim of building a collective and transformative advocacy action to change structures and therefore of the balances of power. The ultimate goal of the transformative empowerment process is for us to arrive at more inclusive forms of power, i.e. more power with and less power over.

3.6. The main dimensions of individual and collective empowerment

In our conceptualisation, each phase of the empowerment process, described above, is characterised by specific dimensions that have been taken up and adapted by different empowerment theories mainly related to the work of Sen and Kabeer.

Resources: referring to Kabeer's conception, the resources not only include material resources in the most conventional sense of the term but also a whole series of human and social resources that serve to increase our ability to make choices[44] In the context of our interventions, for example, access to education, economic resources, personal resources, knowledge, including knowledge of rights and awareness of power distribution, access to information, support networks (social networks/safety nets) fall into this category.

Capabilities the term refers to those skills that allow the woman (or group) to actively choose and obtain a certain result (what Sen called functioning) using the resources she has available. In our conceptualisation, we focus on capabilities in terms of: *individual capabilities* which include hard skills or technical skills (knowledge of IT tools or language skills), soft skills or transversal skills (critical thinking, communication, leadership, conflict management); and *collective capabilities* including the ability to organise, mobilise, be represented and make one's voice heard.

Sense of agency: in line with Kabeer, the sense of agency, i.e. the perception of having a certain degree of control and ability, is considered a cognitive prerequisite for the active exercising of agency.[45] It has generally been measured through two constructs: the perception of having control over one's actions (locus of control) and being effective (self-efficacy).[46] Concepts such as self-esteem and self-confidence are part of this.

Agency: this translates into effective and conscious action that uses the resources and skills available to the woman (or group) to achieve the objectives she has set herself. Agency is distinct from empowerment because empowerment is the overall process in which agency plays a fundamental role.

Structures: this concept refers to the presence of formal and informal institutions that regulate people's behaviour:

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[43] For the definition of structures, see paragraph 3.6.

[44] Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. Development and Change 30(3): 435-64.

[45] Ibidem.

[46] Donald, A. A.; Koolwal, G. B.; Annan, J. R.; Falb, K.; Goldstein, M. P. (2017). *Measuring women's agency.* Policy Research working paper; no. WPS 8148. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

» Formal institutions include legal rules, treaties, constitutions, laws, regulations and political and economic institutions such as companies, state etc.

» Informal institutions include customary norms and conventions, moral values, religious beliefs, traditions and other behavioural norms, customs, which indicate - consciously or subconsciously - what an individual should or can do, such as the stereotyped representation of masculinity and femininity and the gender roles associated with it.

Formal and informal structures influence each other. A clear example of this is the (vertical and horizontal) gender segregation in the labour market and the persistent social division between paid work and unpaid domestic and family work. They materialise as formal economic structures but start from informal structures, i.e. profound ideas about the role of gender in society.

We distinguish two-level structures, which can be questioned in the context of micro- or macro-transformative empowerment paths:

» micro level structures (family, intimate interpersonal relationships, personal attitudes...)

» macro level structures (peer community, school, labour market, politics, social/cultural norms, media).
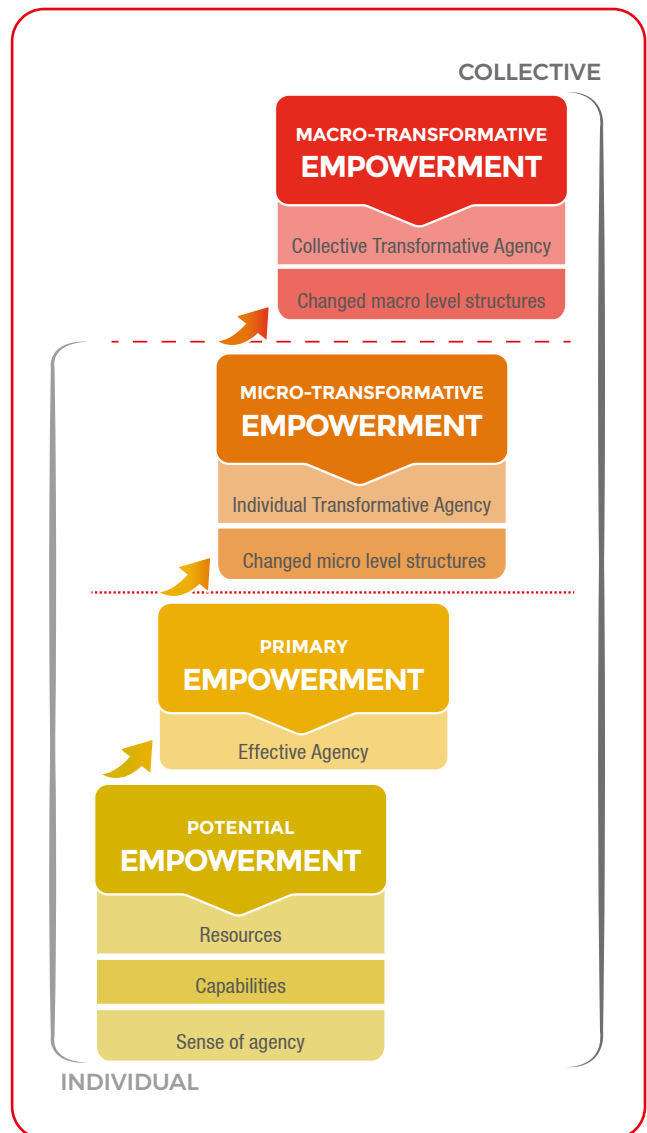
3.7. Measuring individual and collective empowerment: indicators, evidence of change and measurement tools

Our evaluative interest is focused on the description of the empowerment process and therefore the interaction of the different dimensions that make it up. In this sense, we want to define a quali-quantitative framework that allows us to measure, not so much the achievement of a single dimension with a numerical target, but the waste produced in each of them and how this affects the empowerment process as a whole.

In the following table we propose a series of indicators, which are also present in some models mentioned in the previous paragraphs. The idea is that this set of indicators can be used as a whole, or in its individual parts, to measure the change brought about in different dimensions by individual interventions, and as a whole at a programmatic level over defined time periods.

With regard to the quantitative aspect presented in part in the proposed indicators, it is important to consider it as a proxy for a change that can only be fully described from a qualitative perspective. In addition, the evaluation must be adapted to the point of view of the person experiencing the change, whether it is a single woman, a group of women or all women living in a given context. Finally, from an intersectional point of view, it is essential to take into account the overlapping or intersection of the multiple identities of a woman or a group of women, with regard to ethnicity, age, disability, origin, etc.. In this regard, the set of indicators can be enriched with additional spheres of analysis, or by collecting data disaggregated by the proposed dimensions and indicators.

Several of the proposed indicators can be adapted to describe individual and collective changes, while some are formulated specifically for one or the other unit of analysis and must be contextualised. Indicators with an asterisk are specifically designed to describe change in situations of escape from gender-based violence. As far as the measurement of change at the macro-structure level is concerned, the indicators do not refer to an individual or to the community with which ActionAid relates directly, but rather to the "community of place", i.e. to all the people living in the territory where the change takes place.

TABLE 2. **Measuring empowerment**

POTENTIAL EMPOWERMENT

Dimension	Indicators or evidence of change
Resources	Access to information on laws and rights regarding the position and status of women in society, gender equality etc.
	Access to information on support mechanisms for women who suffer violence.*
	Access to material resources (money, goods, property) and credit opportunities.
	Access to decent work opportunities (freedom of choice, quality).
	Accessibility[a] and acceptability[b] of public services.
	Accessibility of Anti-Violence Centres and support associations.*
	Existence of supportive relationships (social capital, safety nets)
Capabilities	Acquisition and strengthening of capacities/skills considered important and necessary, including soft skills.
	Ability to define their own priorities and objectives.
	Creation and strengthening of supportive relationships with individuals and groups outside the household.
	Increased level of interaction and sociality with individuals from different social groups.
	Increased capacity of women and women's groups to form alliances and coalitions to achieve common goals (No. of alliances and coalitions formed to achieve common goals).
Sense of agency	Increased sense of self-esteem (defined as believing in oneself and one's own worth as a person).
	Increased sense of self-efficacy (defined as believing in one's own ability to act effectively towards a goal).
	Increased awareness of one's own power in relation to others.
	Overcoming trauma/overcoming victimisation.*

PRIMARY EMPOWERMENT

Dimension	Indicators or evidence of change
Agency	Number/type of decisions/actions taken by the woman/group.
	Use of services to support the escape from violence, including reporting violence.*
	Organisation and/or participation in collective actions for women's rights.

MICRO-TRANSFORMATIVE EMPOWERMENT

Dimension	Indicators or evidence of change
Micro-Structures	Change in behaviour and practices (e.g. renegotiation of the division of roles within the household, change in the policies of an individual company).
	Escape from a violent relationship.*

MACRO-TRANSFORMATIVE EMPOWERMENT

Dimension	Indicators or evidence of change
Macro-Structures	Strengthening support systems to prevent and combat gender-based violence and to take charge of women.*
	Existence and implementation of laws, policies and funding that support women's rights, access to resources and opportunities (e.g. laws that prevent and combat gender-based violence, its causes and consequences*, introduction of gender-based approaches to neutral policies / services, changes in labour market regulations).
	Availability[c] and adaptability[d] of gender-responsive public services.
	Decrease in the percentage of time spent by women in domestic work and unpaid care work / Increase in male care work.

Development and integration of the set of indicators proposed by CARE and the World Bank compendium on empowerment measurement.

[a] Accessibility means looking at who has access, and checking that public service delivery systems do not discriminate, taking positive steps to reach the most marginalised. v. ActionAid International (2018). Gender-Responsive Public Services: Framework 2018.

[b] "Acceptability means that quality, gender-responsive public services are relevant, non discriminatory and culturally appropriate". v. ActionAid International (2018). Gender-Responsive Public Services: Framework 2018.

[c] Availability can be assessed by analysing the quantitative supply (amount) of services and whether they are economically available to the whole population. v. ActionAid International (2018). Gender-Responsive Public Services: Framework 2018.

[d] Adaptability is founded on the commitment of governments to provide the public with services that meet their needs. v. ActionAid International (2018). Gender-Responsive Public Services: Framework 2018.

The proposed indicators allow the identifiable changes in each of the dimensions to be described. The overall description of the change that takes place in transformative empowerment (micro and macro) must also include the description of the changed power relations. The paths of empowerment are in fact translated into:

1. a containment of the forms of power over and power below in their visible, invisible and hidden manifestations;

2. strengthening of the power of women, or of a group of women to make decisions and act;

3. strengthening of power with, associated with acting together with other subjects, to open spaces of collective claims based on the social fabric and on the construction of collective networks of common interests;

4. strengthening of power in, based on self-esteem, self-efficacy, capabilities, etc.[47] Although forms of power are not mentioned in the table of indicators because they cannot be quantified, the analysis of power is therefore an integral part of the evaluation of empowerment paths.

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[47] Ispirato a Zupi, M. (2016) Zupi, M. (2016). La misurazione dell'empowerment delle donne. Il dibattito sugli indicatori. Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale, Roma.
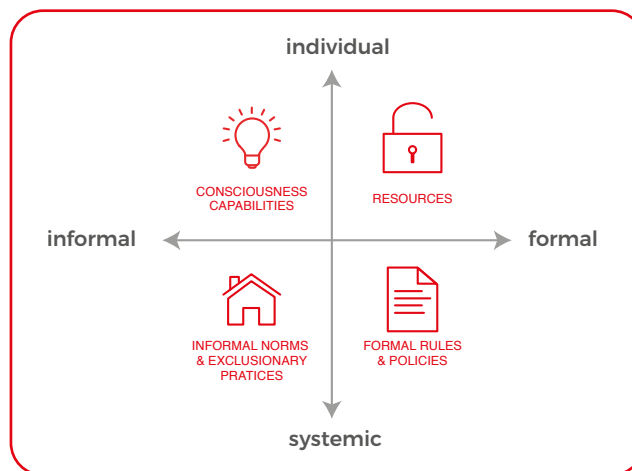
In measuring empowerment, different methodologies and tools can be used. Given the premises on which our proposal is based, we are leaning towards a methodology of data collection and evaluation that can be adapted as much as possible to individual women and that really captures their voice and judgement concerning their own personal empowerment path. This means favouring qualitative methodologies (and the use of tools such as open interviews/focus groups) and participatory methods, such as power circles, the problem tree, social network analysis, which capture qualitative data on small numbers over quantitative and aggregated surveys on large numbers. Generally speaking, it is always advisable to triangulate the information and therefore integrate the qualitative evaluation with quantitative data also available through secondary sources. The description of the components related to the structures is more easily quantitative. In fact, the analysis of informal structures such as prejudices, perceptions and behaviours can be carried out using tools that measure behavioural change, while that of formal structures such as laws, policies and funding are studied through policy analysis and fund monitoring.

The semi-structured questionnaire is a widely used instrument in measurements as it allows us to collect qualitative and quantitative information and to use different types of questions/answers (binary, Likert scale, rating, scoring) depending on the variable to be measured, the time available and the desired specificity. Here, we do not propose a single questionnaire as the questions must always be adapted to the context and to the specific variables you want to measure, but we mention some materials from which you can take inspiration: the *Demographic and Health Surveys* proposed by USAID[48]; the questionnaires developed to measure the WEAI index[49]; the questionnaires developed within the World Bank's *Living Standard Measurement Study* [50]; and various types of validated scales such as the *Personal Progress Scale Revised* (PPS-R)[51]; the *Gender Equitable Men (GEM) Scale*; and the *Domestic Violence Coping Self-Efficacy Measure*. [52] Another interesting tool, for example, is the **WE-MEASR** (Women's Empowerment - Multidimensional Evaluation of Agency, Social Capital & Relations) developed by CARE, which aims to measure the empowerment of women in 3 key domains: Agency, Relations and Social Capital. It consists of 20 small scales that measure the

empowerment of women in domains critical to sexual, reproductive and maternal health. The set of scales can be used in its entirety, or partially, to measure some specific dimensions of the empowerment on which programmes or projects focus.

Finally, another widely recognised reference is the **Gender at Work Framework**[53], an analytical framework useful to measure what kind of change occurs in different domains. The framework emphasises the interrelation between gender equality, organisational changes and institutions or "rules of the game" generated by power dynamics in communities. The Framework is built around two axes: a vertical axis that ranges from individual to systemic and a horizontal axis that ranges from informal to formal. The two quadrants in the upper part concern the individual, while the two lower quadrants concern the system in which she is inserted in a broad sense. On the left side there are changes related to individual consciousness and informal norms or deep structures. While on the right side there are changes in individual conditions (resources, voice, freedom from violence, access to services) and formal rules as structured in constitutions, laws and policies. These elements are useful in describing and analysing gender relationships to identify the "places" where changes can occur.

GRAPHIC 2. **Gender at Work Framework**

individual

CONSCIOUSNESS CAPABILITIES

RESOURCES

informal — formal

INFORMAL NORMS & EXCLUSIONARY PRATICES

FORMAL RULES & POLICIES

systemic

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[48] USAID, The DHS Program (2020). DHS Questionnaires and Manuals https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-dhsq8-dhs-questionnaires-and-manuals.cfm?cssearch=186326_1

[49] Alkire S., Meinzen-Dick R., Peterman, Quisumbing A. R., Seymour G., Vaz A. (2013). The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index. OPHI Working Paper 38. Oxford, UK: Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative https://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ophi-wp-58.pdf.

[50] Grosh M., Glewwe P. (2000). Designing Household Survey Questionnaires for Developing Countries: Lessons from 15 Years of the Living Standards Measurement Study, Volume 3. Washington, DC: World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/15195

[51] Dawn M. Johnson PhD, Judith Worell PhD & Redonna K. Chandler PhD (2005) Assessing Psychological Health and Empowerment in Women: The Personal Progress Scale Revised, Women & Health, 41:1, 109-129, DOI: 10.1300/J013v41n01_07.

[52] Benight C.C., Harding-Taylor A.S., Midboe A.M., Durham R.L. Development and psychometric validation of a Domestic Violence Coping Self-efficacy Measure (DV-CSE). J Trauma Stress. 2004 Dec;17(6):505-8. doi: 10.1007/s10960-004-5799-3.

[53] *Gender at work framework* (2016) https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/.

3.8. Focus on empowerment in the escape from violence

ActionAid sees socio-economic empowerment as a useful and necessary tool for escaping violence. This means, concretely, working on the availability and accessibility of resources, on women's capability and on the development of their agency (potential and primary empowerment), as well as on creating what is considered an *enabling environment* or favourable socio-political conditions. Within our interventions, measuring the empowerment of women who have escaped from paths of violence presents some specificities linked to the condition of particular vulnerability that they experience or have experienced. In this regard, even more than in other cases, it is necessary to make an effort to contextualise the empowerment and its measurement through the use of specific indicators, but also through the qualitative description of the forms and distribution of power within the process.

Consideration of the psychological aspect, particularly in relation to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), is important for the measurement of empowerment in escaping from violence. In this regard, research shows that empowerment interventions in favour of women survivors of violence (generally understood as aiming to enable women to access skills and resources to deal more effectively with current and future stress and trauma) have a mitigating effect on PTSD symptoms in cases of low and moderate levels of violence.[54] That means, in line with our conceptualisation, working on potential empowerment and measuring changes in both resources and skills.

Working on resources and skills has meant, in our interventions, promoting economic independence, or the condition in which women have access to a range of economic opportunities and resources, including employment, services and sufficient disposable income.[55] Indeed, women often remain in abusive relationships because they and their children are financially dependent on their partners.[56] This is particularly true for women emerging from violence, for whom employment is one of the main ways of being economically independent.

In this type of intervention, therefore, indicators referring to employability, employment and working conditions are useful to measure the specific path of socio-economic empowerment. An example of this is the ***Economic Independence Index***, developed during the WeGo! project, which made it possible to group the female participants into those who had high economic independence and those who had low economic independence, on the basis of the following indicators: (i) whether or not they were employed on a permanent basis (ii) whether or not they had a personal income equivalent to or greater than the average net income equivalent per month in Euro in the country where they lived; (iii) whether or not they owned a home. Based on this index, those who had a lower level of economic independence were more likely to have suffered economic, sexual and psychological violence. Moreover, there was a higher probability that the perpetrator of the violence was their current husband/partner. For women with greater economic independence, who were slightly more likely to be exposed to physical violence, the study concluded that the period of stay in a violent relationship tended to be shorter than for those with less economic dependency.

Economic independence therefore plays a role in the decision to abandon a violent relationship, and in this sense socio-economic empowerment contributes to what is called tertiary prevention of gender-based violence, focused on the medium and long-term responses given to women who emerge from it.[57] The economic support included in tertiary prevention is linked to social, employment, financial, legal, housing and childcare support. All these categories are part of the empowerment process and contribute to its measurement according to the specific objectives of the interventions.

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[54] Perez, S., Johnson, D. M., & Wright, C. V. (2012). The attenuating effect of empowerment on IPV-related PTSD symptoms in battered women living in domestic violence shelters. *Violence against women*, *18*(1), 102–117. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801212437348.

[55] Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale, Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2017) Comparative Research Analysis - Conclusions and policy recommendations. https://www.wegoproject.eu/sites/default/files/media/Comparative-Research-Analysis-Conclusions-and-policy-recommendations.pdf.

[56] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) Violence against women: an EU wide survey, Main results. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf.

[57] Primary prevention of gender-based violence focuses on awareness-raising, while secondary prevention indicates the immediate responses given to women survivors of violence.

4. The path of ActionAid Italy: our projects on empowerment

ActionAid works on women's empowerment both internationally and nationally. Since 2015, the organisation has carried out several projects on the subject in Italy and Europe, in collaboration with third sector partners, Anti-Violence Centres and research

institutes, dealing in particular with the empowerment of women who have escaped from situations of domestic violence, women who are victims of violence due to harmful traditional practices, the monitoring of anti-violence funds and actions to combat stereotypes.

We briefly describe how the theme of women's empowerment has been approached in the different interventions in Italy and Europe.

TABLE 3. **Interventions in Italy and Europe**

Target	Focus/Purpose	Level of empowerment	Dimensions	Main activities
DIL WOMEN: IDENTITY AT WORK (Corporate ǀ 2016-2018)				
22 women who have escaped from violence	**Promoting the economic independence of women who have escaped from violence**	**Primary**	Resources Sense of agency Capabilities	Training Coaching Work re-entry
LEI - LABOUR EMPOWERMENT INDEPENDENCE (Corporate ǀ 2019-2020)				
10 women who have escaped from violence	**Promoting the economic independence of women who have escaped from violence**	**Micro-transformative**	Resources Capabilities Formal structures	Training Policy Labs[a]
WEGO! (DG JUST ǀ 2016-2018)				
252 women 140 operators	**Strengthening of interventions in support of women who suffer domestic violence and in particular the activities carried out by anti-violence centres aimed at encouraging their economic empowerment.**	**Potential**	Capabilities	Reflection Action[b] Capacity Building
WEGO! 2 (DG JUST ǀ 2018-2021)				
100 women 120 operators 80 companies	**Promotion of socio-economic empowerment through the strengthening of local, national and European protection and support systems, and the development of women's social networks.**	**Micro-transformative**	Resources Formal structures	Exchange of good practices Increased social networks Training in companies Territorial protocols
WEGO! 3 (DG JUST ǀ 2021-2023)				
180 women 60 operators 25 companies 200 policy lab stakeholders	**Experimentation of cooperation practices between public and private actors for the adaptation of the labour market and especially of labour policies**	**Macro-transformative**	Formal structures	Implementation of territorial protocols Policy Labs Testing of solutions/policies

[a] The methodology of the Policy Labs consists in structuring a path of meetings (on site or online) involving citizens, associations, experts, professionals of the sector under discussion, public authorities. Thanks to the guidance of one or more facilitators, the different aspects of the policy area in question are discussed in plenary or in subgroups. The final objective is to draw up a series of recommendations that are then implemented by the authority responsible for legislating on the subject.

Target	Focus/Purpose	Level of empowerment	Dimensions	Main activities
CAMBIA TERRA (Poste Italiane, DG JUST, Unione Buddisti Italiani, Banca Intesa)				
800 women 120 professionals and PA members	**Improving the social inclusion of migrant women employed in agriculture in Italy, including actions against gender-based violence**	**Micro-transformative**	Resources Capabilities Formal structures	Reflection Action Community Leader Training Community Labs Capacity Building Awareness raising
AFTER (DG JUST I 2016-2018)				
218 women 105 men 26 operators	**To help prevent and combat female genital mutilation by empowering and mobilising migrant women and raising awareness in their communities, as well as developing proposals for European, national and local institutions**	**Micro-transformative**	Resources Capabilities Informal structures	Reflection Action Awareness raising
CHAIN (DG JUST I 2020-2022)				
32 community trainers 96 community leaders 768 professionals	**Strengthening prevention, protection and support for victims of two forms of gender-based violence - female genital mutilation and child marriages**	**Micro-transformative**	Resources Capabilities Facilities	Training of community trainers and professionals Awareness raising Community empowerment Advocacy
YOUTH FOR LOVE (DG JUST I 2018-2021)				
1200 Student 180 school staff	**Prevention of gender-based violence by combating gender stereotypes**	**Micro-transformative**	Capabilities Informal structures Formal structures	School workshops for students and teachers Peer to Peer Serious Game
YOUTH FOR LOVE 2 (DG JUST I 2021-2023)				
400 Students 190 school staff 50 parents 200 community members 40 associations 10 local authorities 15 national and international policy makers	**Promoting the adoption of positive behaviour to prevent and manage violence among adolescents**	**Micro-transformative**	Capabilities Informal structures Formal structures	School workshops for students, teachers and parents Peer to Peer Serious Game Advocacy Campaigning
MONITORAGGIO FONDI (ActionAid I 2013-ongoing)				
Equal Opportunities Departments, Regions local authorities anti-violence centres and refuge houses	**To ensure that state anti-violence funds are managed by national and local institutions in a transparent manner and regularly distributed to anti-violence centers and shelters.**	**Macro-transformative**	Formal structures	Desk research (document collection/analysis) Key stakeholder interviews

[b] Reflection-Action is a methodology inspired by the theories of Robert Chambers on participatory methods and Paulo Freire on education. It is used by ActionAid in various countries around the world where it implements programmes against poverty and social injustice. The participants work together to analyse their situation, identify violations of rights and choose the change they want to make, through a path of reflection and action.

4.1. Pilot projects and work on economic independence

BOX 1:

DIL (WOMEN: IDENTITY AT WORK) AND LEI (LABOUR, EMPOWERMENT, INDEPENDENCE)

The aim of these projects has been to provide women who have escaped from situations of domestic violence with theoretical and practical tools to facilitate their employment in order to promote their economic independence and autonomy. This has been achieved through the consolidation and expansion of the skills that can be used in the world of work (specifically in tailoring) and through the reintegration of the assisted women into the labour market through the search for apprenticeship and job opportunities and the acquisition of tools to start their own business. The actions also worked on the development of transversal skills (soft skills), increasing self-confidence and creating mutually supportive relationships. The interventions have made it possible to experiment a partnership with anti-violence centres and women, focusing on achieving economic independence as a tool to promote the escape from violence.
The dimensions of empowerment promoted were: self-confidence, sense of self-efficacy and skill development.

4.2. The European projects

Within the European Rights Equality and Citizenship Programme, funded by the European Commission's DG Justice[58], ActionAid has carried out a series of projects in partnership with Italian and European non-governmental organisations and research centres.

BOX 2:

WE GO! AND THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO EMPOWERMENT

The WE GO! project, currently in its second phase, responds to the need for women to gain the economic independence they need to leave a violent partner and to have access to sustainable alternatives for themselves and their children. The specific objectives of the three editions of the project are: the strengthening of interventions in support of women suffering from domestic violence and in particular of the activities carried out by the anti-violence centres aimed at fostering their economic empowerment; the promotion of socio-economic empowerment through the strengthening of local, national and European protection and support systems, through the dissemination of good practices and the implementation of multi-agency cooperation networks between public and private actors; the experimentation of cooperation practices between public and private actors for the adjustment of the labour market and especially of labour policies.

As far as the *measurement of empowerment* is concerned, in the first edition a study carried out by the project partners demonstrated the importance of economic independence in the escape from violence.[59] In the second project, a social network analysis is carried out at the level of both the women involved and the anti-violence centres, with the aim of showing the relationship between the development of social networks and the socio-economic empowerment of women.

WeGo! is characterized by a **multidimensional approach to empowerment** and promotes both the empowerment of **individual women**, working on **skills and relationships**, and the change of **structures**: increasing the **empowerment of the support system** with capacity and network building actions, raising awareness of relevant actors and promoting the **change of laws** that do not adequately respond to the needs of women emerging from violence.

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[58] Justice and Consumers Funding, Tenders, European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/programmes-2014-2020/rec/index_en.htm.
[59] IRS, MIGS (2017). We Go! Project Comparative Research Analysis - Final Report, https://www.wegoproject.eu/sites/default/files/media/Comparative-Research-Analysis-Final-Report.pdf.

BOX 3:
CAMBIA TERRA

The target group of this programme mainly consists of migrant women employed in the agricultural sector in Southern Italy. The first edition of Cambia Terra was created with the primary objective of combating undeclared work and the exploitation of women employed in agriculture, including the prevention and combating of gender-based violence. This was joined by a broader focus on European citizenship rights in the European project Bright. In particular, Bright provides training and awareness raising actions for Romanian and Bulgarian women employed in the agricultural sector in Italy, and in their countries of origin, on citizenship rights, labour market and transversal skills and the experimentation of Public-Public Partnership Agreements between local institutions, mobile citizens, employers, trade unions and third sector to improve access to services. Actions designed to raise the awareness of all the actors involved in relation to women's rights, and the prevention and combating of gender-based violence are also performed.

The empowerment dimensions on which we focus mainly concern elements of knowledge and awareness of women's rights, and the change of structures, in this case defined as services available to them.

BOX 4:
AFTER AND CHAIN: THE EMPOWERMENT OF MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Unlike the previous examples focused on socio-economic empowerment, both these projects focus on the theme of empowerment as a contrast to all forms of violence against women and as a means of promoting women and girls' freedom of choice over their bodies. In particular, the **AFTER** project (Against FGM/C through Empowerment and rejection) has contributed to strengthening the prevention and the fight against the practice of female genital mutilation, through the empowerment and mobilisation of migrant women and their communities, as well as the elaboration of proposals for European, national and local institutions. In continuity, the **CHAIN** project aims to strengthen prevention, protection and support to girls and women who have suffered, or are at risk of suffering, female genital mutilation and child and forced marriages, through service capacity building, community empowerment and awareness raising activities, and advocacy actions at the level of political institutions.

The dimensions of empowerment promoted are in both cases related to the awareness of one's rights, the ability to speak up about one's claims and the fight against informal structures that treat women unfairly.

BOX 5:
YOUTH FOR LOVE AND ACTIONS AGAINST STEREOTYPES

Youth for Love contributes to the prevention of gender-based violence among adolescents by promoting new teaching methodologies and educational tools that increase the awareness of students, teachers and school staff about the phenomenon and its elimination. Two central elements in this project are the change in attitudes and behaviours linked to gender stereotypes and unfair formal and informal social structures, and the strengthening of systems for the prevention and management of violence in school and in the territory.

Although empowerment is not one of the project's explicit objectives, it does act **by modifying formal and informal structures and thus creating the conditions within which the effective empowerment of women is fostered**.

4.3. Monitoring of anti-violence funds

Since 2013 ActionAid has been monitoring the state anti-violence funds provided for by law 119/2013. The objective of this activity is to verify that the resources allocated to prevent violence and provide support to the women who suffer it are provided by national and local institutions regularly, quickly and transparently to anti-violence centers and shelters. Through this monitoring activity, ActionAid measures Italy's concrete commitment in the fight against violence against women, in compliance with the obligations established by national legislation and the Istanbul Convention.

Of course, this action also helps to **change the structures within which women find themselves seeking empowerment**.

5. Conclusions and next steps

Despite the wide theoretical and practical production related to empowerment, it is still difficult to adopt a shared standard, as empowerment is a specific concept, linked to the contexts and objectives of interventions. This document aims to define an approach to measuring empowerment that allows us to understand and report on the outcome of our projects in an aggregate way.

The ambition of this document is not to construct an index, but to define a framework in which the different stages of the empowerment process, the dimensions and forms of power interacting within the process are identified. We then proposed, by way of example, a range of indicators for each dimension and identified a number of data collection methodologies that will have to be adapted from time to time to capture the specific characteristics of the intervention context. The idea is that this framework represents the vocabulary within which to search for definitions and interactions that can be used to describe and evaluate the specific empowerment paths we work on with women and women's groups, and the actions we take on the different micro and macro structures.

The framework presented will be used as a tool in the evaluations of current and future projects that intervene on this issue, also asking external evaluators to test its validity and adequacy. In this sense, the framework in its current version is designed as a flexible tool that can be modified or integrated in the light of the evolution of ActionAid's and its partners' intervention on the issue.

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