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Engaging gender equality in the economic-productive sphere*

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Abstract

This study reviews the conceptual framework of the economic-productive sphere and of gender equality, the aim of which is to establish theoretical-practical lines allowing progress in engaging these two spheres. In this context, equality in opportunities and in rights can be harmonized, though equality of “responsibilities, resources and retribution” by gender are more difficult to reconcile. Also, women’s (economic) empowerment – seen as a way of promoting gender equality – possesses a degree of relation with the theory of growth and wellbeing when an individual has the role of consumer, for which “capabilities” are needed for selecting valuable “functionings”. However, when such a woman takes on the role of worker, producer or businesswoman, her seeking of a high level of economic-productive performance does not imply that she is empowered, nor does the latter imply the former; though there may be a positive correlation between the two. On this basis, economic-productive interventions may harmonize with equality of opportunities by gender.

Key Words: economic growth, social well-being, gender, gender equality, empowerment

JEL Codes: A12, D63, I31, J16, O4

Resumen

El presente documento revisa los marcos conceptuales del ámbito económico-productivo y de la igualdad de género con el fin de establecer líneas teórico-prácticas que permitan avanzar en el engranaje de ambos ámbitos. Bajo este contexto, la igualdad de oportunidades y la igualdad de derechos pueden ser armonizados; pero la igualdad de “responsabilidades, recursos y recompensas” por género son más difíciles de conciliar. Por otro lado, el empoderamiento (económico) femenino –visto como una forma de promover la igualdad de género– guarda cierta relación con la teoría del crecimiento y el bienestar cuando una persona tiene el rol de consumidora, pues necesita “capacidades” para seleccionar “funcionamientos” valorables. Sin embargo, cuando esta persona asume el rol de trabajadora, productora o empresaria, la búsqueda de un desempeño económico-

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productivo alto no implica que esté empoderada y viceversa; aunque puede haber alguna asociación positiva. En este marco, las intervenciones económico-productivas pueden armonizarse con una igualdad de oportunidades por género.

Palabras clave: crecimiento económico, bienestar social, género, igualdad de género, empoderamiento.

Códigos JEL: A12, D63, I31, J16, O4.

I. Introduction

The pursuit of gender equality has its roots in the feminist social movements that exposed situations of exploitation, subjugation and downgrading of women in the different spheres of interrelationship between them and men – in political, legal, sociocultural, economic, and other forms. These movements allowed progress towards equality between men and women under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and then with the enactment of a series of measures that gave priority status to the gender theme in the development agendas and public policies at the global level.

In this context, the actions of gender equality and women's empowerment - seen as fostering equality - gained increasingly prominent spaces in the different spheres of the academic, theoretical and practical scopes, particularly in matters related to policies, programs and projects. However, the interrelationship between this activism and academia has faced a number of challenges in terms of harmonization.

The present document establishes theoretical-practical lines for making progress in engaging gender equality with the economic-productive sphere. In this study, it can be seen that from the economic perspective, the concept of *equality of opportunities* associated with inclusive growth is the ideal candidate for the harmonization of ideas, theories and practices, allowing at the same time the application of a gender approach in economic-productive interventions; *i.e.*, policies, programs and projects.

This document has four sections in addition to the present introduction. Section II briefly describes the concepts of the economic-productive sphere that are relevant for being reconciled with the gender sphere. Section III makes a brief literature review on gender, gender equality and women's empowerment. Section IV evaluates both spheres in view of their multidimensional objectives and characteristics, identifying some engagement between the two, particularly in terms of equality of opportunities. Finally, the last section presents the principal conclusions.

II. Literature review of the economic-productive sphere

II.1. Economic growth and productive dynamics

In economic literature, the indicator that summarizes the economic-productive sphere of a country is economic growth, which is defined as **long-term annual average percentage increase in per capita product**¹, which is measured through gross domestic product (or national output) – GDP or GNP. It is essentially a supply phenomenon, characterized through productive processes and their transformations, generally summarized in a production function that aggregates all final goods and services (*e.g.*, agriculture, manufacturing, education, health, transportation). Under this scheme, physical capital, work (human capital), natural resources, and technology, intrinsically related to the previously mentioned elements, are their fundamental components (also called factors of production or productive resources). Considering their levels, states and forms of change or accumulation, all of these components explain the growth behavior, which may be “high”, “low”, etc. (see, *e.g.*, Barro and Sala-i-Martin, 1995; Muriel and Nina, 2003)².

In several debates surrounding public policy, other factors that affect or determine economic growth are proposed; these have been called *environment variables* (Barro and Sala-i-Martin, 1995). Among these are, for example, institutions (laws, bodies, etc.), trade integration policies (and their results in terms of international trade flows), macroeconomic stability and sociopolitical stability. All of these variables are important for expanding or reducing (long-term) production per capita to the extent that they positively or negatively, and directly or indirectly, affect the fundamental components mentioned, as well as the productive processes themselves, in addition to their distributions.

It is worth noting that **economic growth is not an end in itself, but rather a means that seeks to maximize the wellbeing or quality of life of a society**. This vision is based on the tenets of the first economists, such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo. It was even formalized mathematically by Frank Ramsey in 1928 (cited by Muriel, 1998). Given this, and with the aim of clarifying much criticism in non-economic literature, it is important to highlight that GDP (or GNP) per capita, whether measured by level or in terms of growth, is not the main objective. A high rate of economic growth is desirable and implies that more labor income is being generated³, as well as greater rent, allowing the consumption of goods and services, and hence quality of life.

¹ The long-term may be approximated by a period of 10 years or more.

² The literature on economic growth generally excludes analysis of intermediate consumption, so as to analyze the topic in a simpler manner, without losing its general nature.

³ For employees, this income corresponds to a salary; for independent workers, to their profit (also called mixed income).

Under the positivist approach, the wellbeing of a society is simplified through the utility function of a representative individual (under the assumption that people are identical).

This function represents the degree of satisfaction of preferences or the satisfaction generated by the consumption of goods (food, clothing, housing, etc.) and services (education, health, tourism, basic services, etc.). It is determined for each year (assuming that the individual's life is eternal) through the sum of present and future utilities, with an intertemporal ponderation that considers that the satisfaction obtained by consuming now is greater than that obtained by consuming tomorrow. All of these assumptions allow concentrating studies on productive transformations, where increasing production and productivity is generally sought⁴ with the aim of increasing the rate of economic growth.

Based on this framework of aggregated, or macroeconomic analysis of production, it is possible to do an analysis at the sector level and even at the business, or microeconomic level⁵, focusing on growth at one of these levels. The environment variables are redefined as the investment or business climate, considering variables relevant for the level of the study. Besides, from this perspective, a given sector can be associated to others through a flowchart, and a relationship can be established with more specific actors that determine both the factors of production and the environment variables⁶.

Figure 1 shows, in a summarized manner, this dynamic for the agricultural sector. The productive process of this sector implies a series of activities (preparing the soil, sowing, etc.) which are carried out with fundamental components (land, water, work of farmers, capital, etc.), and other intermediate inputs (seeds, fertilizers, etc.). It is worth recalling that environment variables influence both the primary and intermediate factors, as well as the production process itself. For example, the "credit" variable may favor a purchase of seeds of better quality, but the variable "drought" may reduce yield, and hence the amount of product harvested.

It is worth noting that once a determined quantity of agricultural product has been obtained, it may be employed in final demand (consumption or investment) or as intermediate consumption for generating other products, by means of the intervention of other sectors, such as transportation and trade⁷.

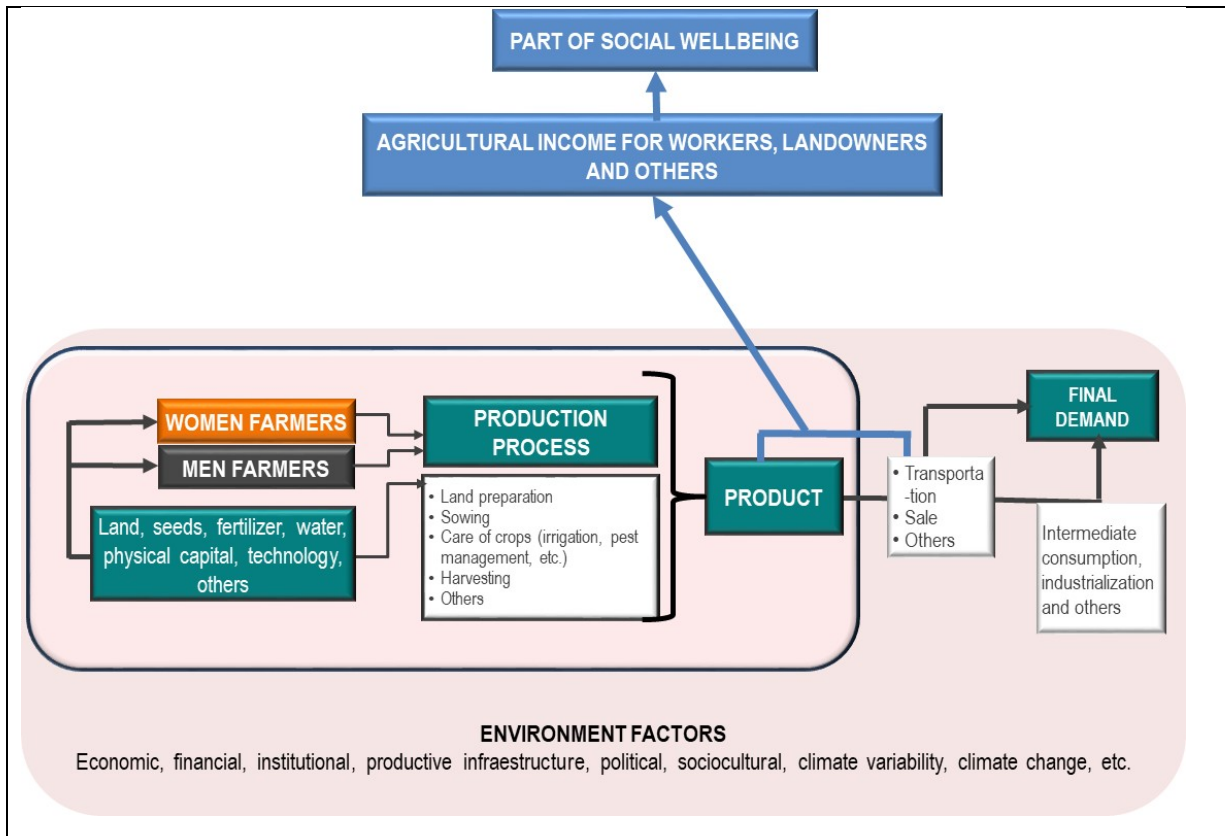
⁴ Productivity measures the use of the factors of production (and intermediate consumption) by unit of product. Thus, increasing productivity implies the use of less factors of production (and intermediate consumption) for producing the same unit of product, and therefore, *ceteris paribus*, unit costs are reduced.

⁵ Temporality in these cases changes according to the analysis sought.

⁶ All of these economic disaggregations are part of GDP or GNP.

⁷ For the sake simplicity, and without losing the general sense, it is assumed that there is no on-farm consumption.

Figure 1: Productive dynamics of the agricultural sector



Source: Own preparation

A greater and more efficient use - *i.e.*, greater productivity - of the factors of production (including intermediate consumption) generates more production. This in turn allows generating higher agricultural income to be employed in more consumption of goods and services. At this point, the wellbeing of the actors that are part of the sector (farmers, landowners, capital owners, etc.) will improve⁸. However, part of this income will be saved to be employed in investment, allowing an increase in primary and intermediate inputs, and thus greater production⁹.

⁸ Through, for example, taxes, as will be seen, these actors will also affect the wellbeing of the rest of the population.

⁹ Note that savings are not necessarily destined to the same sector. The literature on general equilibrium models takes into consideration all interrelations of the sectors in terms of production, income, consumption, savings, and investment, among others.

II.2. Social wellbeing

As previously mentioned, conceptualizing the measure of social wellbeing to a representative consumer (who in theory lives eternally), makes the analysis of economic growth focus on production and income; however, this assumption cannot be applied to evaluate inequality and heterogeneity between individuals in terms of the consumption of goods and services. Regarding this, in the economic literature – which is also based on mathematical, philosophical, social, and political theories – there is great debate surrounding social wellbeing and the implications of the underlying inequality and heterogeneity. In contrast, in this debate, the analysis of economic growth is usually removed, considering that individuals have endowments for consumption, and lessening the importance of inter-temporality¹⁰. Such assumptions are made with the aim of including the entire population in the social wellbeing function.

In this context, an initial approximation was the so-called *Benthamite utilitarianism*, under the assumption that social wellbeing corresponds to the sum of individual utilities (*i.e.*, the achievements of satisfaction through preferences). In this model, the utility function is equal for all individuals, and hence equal (or different) domains – baskets of consumption derived from the provisions – lead to equal (or different, respectively) counter-domains; *i.e.*, levels of utility, in some cases called “utils”. This concept of social wellbeing has been used mainly for understanding how markets work. However, it does have its limitations in the sphere of wellbeing as such, and was thus subject to three types of criticism¹¹.

The first of these is that different baskets of consumption lead to different levels of wellbeing, and therefore, under Benthamite utilitarianism, problems of inequality are not considered. Regarding this, Rawls (cited in Atkinson and Stiglitz, 1980) consider that there is a basis of primary goods and services that must be made equal, and this can be interpreted as the evaluation of wellbeing based on the utility of the individual who is in the worst situation. At one extreme, what is referred to as the “egalitarian principle” considers that consumption baskets must be equal for all, as must the income available for obtaining them, even though the levels of utility may be different; that is, even if there are inequalities in the “utils” - for example, if some individuals work¹² and others do not (see, *e.g.*, Atkinson and Stiglitz, 1980).

The second criticism questions the assumption of homogeneity, which opens up the debate on the type of equality desired to maximize social wellbeing. For example, Dworkin (cited by Ferreira

¹⁰ Although this point is not part of the debate of the paper’s analysis, inter-temporality is essential because present decisions affect future populations, and thus the future levels of wellbeing.

¹¹ As will be seen, this criticism justifies the existence of a State that collects taxes or captures income to be employed in making compensations to foster greater equality.

¹² In microeconomic theory, work is usually considered an element of dis-utility and is part of the utility function under this premise.

and Peragine, 2015) considers that in a world with heterogenous preferences and tastes - *i.e.*, different utility functions - seeking an equal level of wellbeing for the population implies providing more resources to those with expensive tastes; *e.g.*, with different consumption baskets for reaching the same “utils”, something which is ethically unacceptable. For this reason, Dworkin contends that justice must seek equality of resources; *e.g.*, in income or in consumption baskets.

Regarding this, Arneson and Cohen (cited by Ferreira and Peragine, 2015) state that in the debate on equality, the relevant distinction is not between income and preferences, but rather between the factors that are within the sphere of individual responsibility and those which are not; *i.e.*, the circumstances. For example, Cohen (1993) argues that if an individual made use of a given income in a game of chance and lost it, this person does not have the right to any compensation (from the State). Arneson and Cohen consider that the important opportunities are those defined as possibilities that exist for obtaining a good if it is sought.

The last criticism groups together the previous ones and additionally questions the consumption of goods and services, and utility, as elements of analysis for delimiting wellbeing. Regarding this, Sen (Sen, 1985, 1989) proposes **considering social wellbeing based on “functionings” and “capabilities”**. People value their abilities to “do” things and achieve certain types of “being”, which correspond to particular “functionings”¹³. For example, a particular consumption basket of food is important for being “fed”, but the level of nutrition will differ when the individuals, despite consuming the same amount of food, have different metabolism rates. In turn, a person’s “capabilities” correspond to the ordered series of feasible “functionings”, among which the individuals have the freedom to choose in order to lead the life they wish. Also, these “capabilities” are different for each person. For example, a person may opt for not consuming the basket of food not “to go hungry”, but rather because they decided to fast (having the option to do it), while a person living in extreme poverty does not have this consumption option and only has the possibility – within their “capabilities” – “to go hungry” (see Sen, 1989).

At the level of the population, Sen states that the first step is to identify the “functionings” which are valuable for a society, those which allow knowing the “quality of life achieved”, in order to progress towards greater social wellbeing. Some examples of these “functionings” are “being healthy”, “being a society free from political oppression” and “being literate” (Sen, 1989; Basu and López-Calva, 2011).

Given this, Basu and López-Calva (2011) assert that the “capabilities” approach is not incompatible with the assumption that people seek to reach or maximize their wellbeing.

¹³ Sen moves away from the goods approach and concentrates on what goods do for humans. (Cohen, 1993)

Additionally, the authors state that the notion of utility may be reconciled with “functionings”, acknowledging that the latter emerged prior to the concept of utility and that goods and services are the instruments that allow achieving certain “functionings”. This being said, it is worth noting that in this conciliation between theories Sen conceives a broader range of the goods and services produced economically; *e.g.*, to be free of political oppression¹⁴.

The debate on social wellbeing may conclude with Ferreira and Peragine (2015), who emphasize **equality of opportunities** when stating that an equitable society is not necessarily one that makes all persons equally content, rich or educated, but rather one that ensures for its entire population the same opportunities for attaining the results or achievements that each person chooses to take advantage of. For this reason, according to the authors, equality in a particular observed result cannot be judged simply by its distribution, because information is needed for understanding its relationship with the entirety of options available for the individuals. In this framework, the distribution of a result may be considered equitable or not depending on whether it reflects or not the differences in the sets of options – that go beyond individual responsibility – or the different choices and preferences within these groups of options, where the individuals are responsible for the choices and preferences¹⁵.

In the practical sense, the debate surrounding the wellbeing of a society has led to indicators that can measure its condition and the changes that occur in time, in some cases making use of the opposite (deprivation). Such are the examples of Unsatisfied Basic Needs, the Human Development Index and Multidimensional Poverty.

II.3. Descriptive adjectives of growth

Even though with acceleration of economic growth an increase in the level of social wellbeing is sought, there was extensive debate – since about 1950 – on the dissociation observed between growth and the socioeconomic results desired, mainly in terms of equality. For this reason, descriptive adjectives of growth were proposed, seeking conceptualizations that consider both increases in per capita gross domestic product (GDP) and, intrinsically, socioeconomic

¹⁴ These are generally ones which do not have an established price and are not traded in the markets.

¹⁵ Equality of opportunities is a particularly important perspective, as it includes at least two points in time: the initial opportunities (in period $t-n$) and the posterior ones (in t). Under this scheme, it is worth noting that it is ethically difficult to support a “freedom to choose” that is unconditioned in the future. For example, within “capabilities” it is possible to find the “functioning” of “be working”, which may constitute a disutility for a group of persons (hence, in this case, this “functioning” would not be chosen). The question relates to whether it is ethical, fair and even sustainable in time if another group of persons work to provide sufficient resources and, from here compensations, so that the “capabilities” of those who do not work are kept. The answer is no, and therefore the freedom of these persons will be affected, because they will have to work. This is an example of the relevance of inter-temporality in conceptualizations.

improvements (Muriel, 2020). Examples of such adjectives are “pro-poor growth” and “inclusive growth”¹⁶.

Pro-poor growth may be conceived as one that favors the poor (*i.e.*, that reduces poverty), be it in an “absolute” dimension, without considering inequality, or in a “relative” dimension, with greater redistribution of income (see, for a discussion in the literature, Herrera, 2014). In this conceptualization, it is important to highlight Kakwani and Pernia (2000) for their connection with the definition of economic empowerment, which Eyben *et al.* (2008) later describe, as they consider that this growth must be one allowing the poor to actively participate and significantly benefit from economic activities.

Additionally, Kakwani and Pernia (2000) consider that growth, beyond being pro-poor, could approach being inclusive, though Klasen (2010, cited by Herrera, 2014) points out that inclusiveness must reduce disadvantages without excluding any segment of the population. Under this context, Ali and Son (2007) state that inclusive growth is one that improves both the result and the distribution of access to socioeconomic opportunities – *e.g.*, employment, health and education – for all segments of society, particularly for the poorest. Thus, growth must be such that it improves the average and the distribution of opportunities.

II.4. Growth, wellbeing and equality

Figure 2 summarizes the conceptual framework previously described. The percentage variation of the production of goods and services in period t in relation to $t-1$ corresponds to the annual rate of growth of GDP (or GNP). This scheme may be replicated for n periods and can also be adjusted in per capita terms to obtain economic growth; this is not illustrated in the figure for the sake of simplicity¹⁷.

The final aggregate production obtained is equal to both labor income and rents, and to final expenditure – savings and consumption of final goods and services¹⁸, leading to social wellbeing. In Figure 1, for example, the goods and services are divided into three similar baskets, considering that there are only three individuals in the economy. This distribution is not the result of the production and income derived from it, as there are multiple differences in the ownership of the factors of production (and their associated returns), in the productive processes, and in the prices of the different goods and services. However, in the example it is

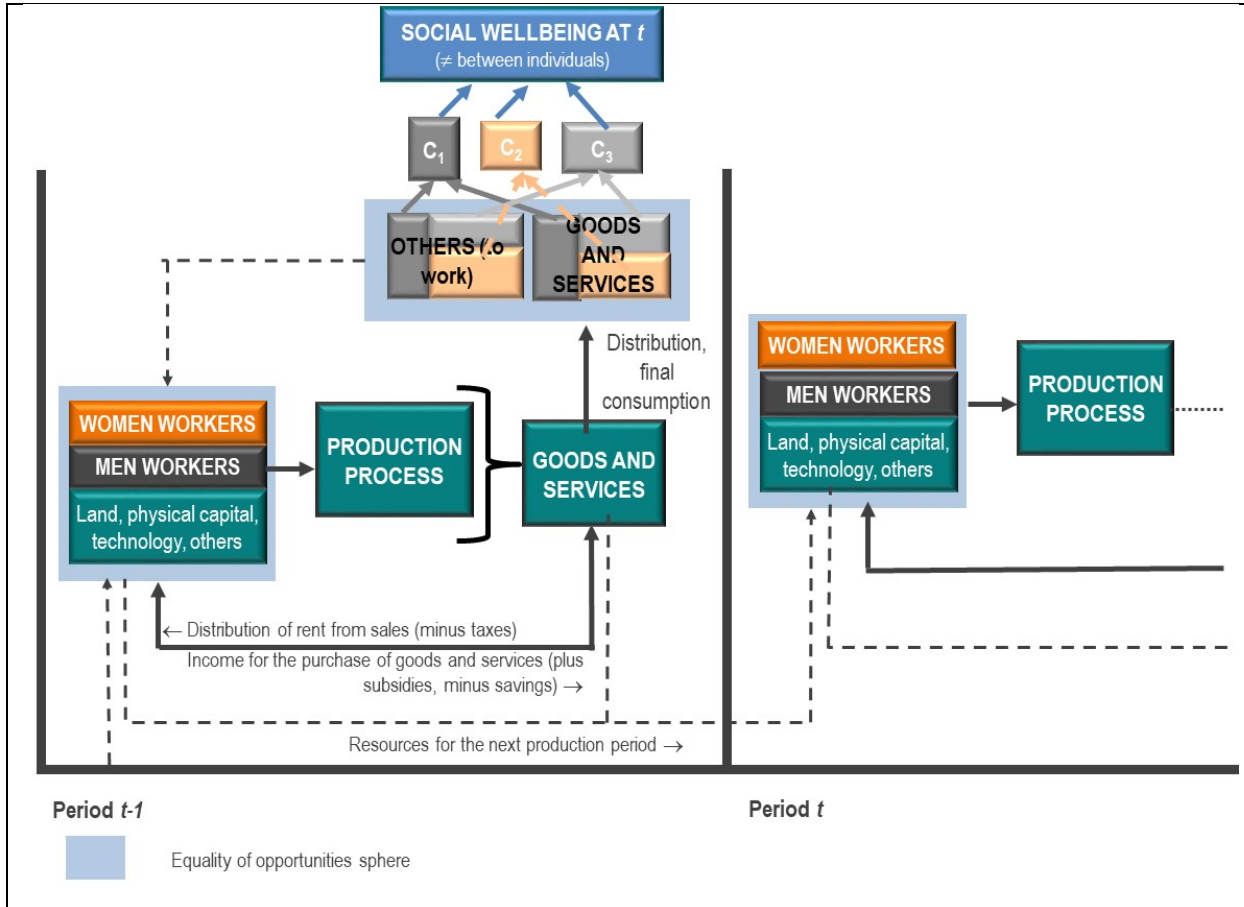
¹⁶ These concepts are discussed in the present document because, as will be seen, they are included in the literature on gender.

¹⁷ Besides this, and without losing the general sense, intermediate consumption in production and the variables of the environment are not included.

¹⁸ Once again, without losing the general sense, interaction with the rest of the world, the markets and the State is not included. The State is included solely in terms of taxes that allow making compensations.

assumed that the compensations – via taxes and subsidies – allow reaching this result. Also, the goods and services that are not part of the production processes under the mentioned economic scheme are included, as they are also important for determining social wellbeing.

Figure 2: Systemic framework of economic growth and social wellbeing



Source: Own preparation

Summarizing Sen, in period $t-1$, social wellbeing comes from the “capabilities” (the entire set of feasible “functionings”) and from the chosen “functionings” that are valuable. In Figure 2, C_1 , C_2 and C_3 are the “capabilities” of the three individuals; the “functionings” chosen from these “capabilities” are those that are intrinsically part of social wellbeing. According to the author’s vision, these “capabilities” differ among individuals, even when the goods and services are divided into three equal parts. Additionally, “freedom to choose” implies that the “functionings” selected are different, as are the levels of wellbeing when measured under a given metric. Given

this, as Sen points out, from a societal perspective, the important thing is to provide people with certain goods and services so that the “functionings” derived from them are considered valuable by society, such as being well nourished, being literate, etc. For this, a certain redistribution of the baskets of goods and services derived would be necessary, in favor of those most disadvantaged.

Figure 2 also shows the sphere pertaining to equality of opportunities. However, it is not implied that the baskets of goods and services and the levels of wellbeing will be the same at $t-1$ or afterwards. For example, imagine that the State provides access to technical education for two years for the three individuals in the figure, who are high school graduates, and at the end of the two years it is observed that only one of them completed their studies with graduation. The second individual chose, of his own free will, to dedicate his/her time to tourism and recreational activities, not taking on the responsibility of studying. The third individual chose to study, but at the start of the second year his/her parents die in an accident, and this strongly affects his/her emotional condition, limiting the continuation of his/her studies. Besides, at the end of the two years (at $t+1$), it is also observed that the level of wellbeing of the second individual is higher. Under this example, the “reasonable” intervention associated with the same opportunities would have been to add effective psychological support – the provision of a new service – for the third individual, so as to support his/her in the completion of his/her studies. In the following years, the State can foster access to work for the three individuals; however, it cannot be expected that their salaries be equal, because, *ceteris paribus*, their number of years of studies differ¹⁹. Thus, the compensations that the State can make for the second individual are difficult to accept ethically, and not so for the third individual.

Under this context, the seeking of work opportunities is also related to inclusive growth, according to the definitions of Kakwani and Pernia (2000), and Ali and Son (2007), among others. In the present case, it is important to highlight that for making inclusiveness possible it is essential to have a high economic growth, or that it at least positive, which implies employing the factors of production effectively (efficiently and efficaciously) and in a virtuous manner. This would imply, for example, fostering employment for the three individuals according to their skills and efforts, which would lead to different labor returns. In the end, the State should evaluate which goods and services are valuable and necessary for society, and focus compensations for promoting a certain degree of equality.

¹⁹ It is worth recalling that according to the theory of human capital (Becker, 1964), there is a positive empirical relationship between salaries and years of studies.

III. Literature review on gender

III.1. Gender and gender inequalities

The concept of gender makes reference to the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes, which in a particular time period, are considered appropriate for the women and men of a given society. The literature points out that these elements have been constructed and learned through a process of socialization throughout history, and that based on them, the relations between men and women were also generated. According to this, gender has represented a set of characteristics “attributed” to the sexes, which have generated economic, sociocultural, political, legal and psychological gaps, among others (Lagarde, 1996; Moreno y Alcántara, 2016)²⁰.

Alternatively, according to Cazés (1998), the recognition and designation of the sex of a new member of a family, and hence for society, triggers a series of processes aimed at ensuring that males be masculine and females be feminine. Included in the gender category are such characteristics and behaviors that are socially defined as representative of one and the other sex, as are the norms that govern expressions of masculinity and femininity, and the relations between men and women.

According to Moreno (2005; cited in Ballara and Parada, 2009), in rural areas – where generally agricultural production takes place – the roles, behavior, activities, and attributes of men and women are also constructed through gender, but additionally possess particular traits associated with the land, the territory and nature as sources of resources. These roles, as well as the conditions and spaces in which they are expressed, gave rise to differentiations in the tasks and benefits obtained by men and women, leading to a series of structural inequalities.

In the sphere of the economy, feminist literature purports that worker-employer relations, which emerged with the creation of factories in the first industrial revolution, are the origin of gender inequalities in terms of the division of work by sex. From this period onward – it is argued – a hierarchization of paid labor was created in the factories, with the work generally being done by men, and the women dedicated to caring for the home (Larguía and Dumoulin, 1976; Ballara and Parada, 2009).

Additionally, these theories highlight that in this socioeconomic dynamic, the household activities that women performed led to them being relegated, undervalued and disempowered. They were

²⁰ Sex, on the other hand, refers to the biological and physiological characteristics – organic conditions not derived from a social construct – in men and women, common to all societies and cultures.

thus limited to the following roles: “strictly biological reproduction”, that is, the responsibility for carrying and bearing children; “reproduction of what the labor force consumes daily”; that is, the household work for the maintenance and sustenance of the active members of the home; and “social reproduction”; that is, the tasks aimed at supporting the social system, particularly care and socialization of the children, the sick and the elderly (see, *e.g.*, Larguía and Dumoulin, 1976).

This being said, history shows that the recruitment of entire families in the nascent factories in Great Britain, particularly in the textile industry, was common practice, as male manual labor was more costly and employed to supervise the wife and children, and to perform tasks that required qualification; while female work was in tasks that were specific, poorly paid and required less qualification²¹. Additionally, women realized an essential role, though in the shadows, in family businesses, as they possessed savings from their families, ensured the incorporation of new partners, strengthened or extended the business networks, and gave continuity to the companies when the husbands died (Valdaliso and López, 2007).

Furthermore, in the agriculture-livestock and rural spheres, the feudal and colonial systems began to disappear with agrarian reforms and the industrialization process itself. Many farmers and serfs obtained land of their own (individual and/or communal), with more economic resources being obtained from their work. With these transformations there emerged a form of family farming, and intensive and scale agriculture, which to a great degree was based on the worker-employer labor relations previously described. In the first case, the traditional work divisions by sex seem to have persisted, as women were responsible for caring for the home, and (together with men) for the crops and animals.

In the 21st century, gender roles both within and outside the home persisted (despite being less marked), with disparities in the rates of participation in the workforce both in urban and rural areas. Thus, the responsibility of women in caring for the home is even greater and more significant than that of men. In several cases, these disparities respond to a greater number of work hours for women who participate in the economically active population, with consequently less time dedicated to leisure (see, *e.g.*, OECD, 2012; UN Women, 2015).

III.2. Gender equality and economic empowerment

In the face of the inequalities mentioned, the position has been taken to actively foster gender equality as an intrinsic part of development in its different dimensions. This equality refers to parity in rights, responsibilities, opportunities, resources, and retribution for women and men, without these dimensions being limited by the social stereotypes or constructs assigned. Along

²¹ In 1811 in Great Britain, the birthplace of industrialization, women made up 30% of the worker population, and most businesspersons were men (Valdaliso and López, 2007).

these lines, the position is that the perceptions, interests, needs, and priorities of women and of men must be taken into consideration both by social justice and by the development sphere (CARE International, 2009, cited in Jost *et al.*, 2014). Following the logic of Sen (1985, 1989), gender equality also makes reference to the freedom that people have for expanding their “capabilities” and choosing their “functionings” without the restrictions imposed by beliefs, stereotypes and prejudices in terms of what it means to be a man or a woman (Vargas and Gambará, 2008).

A fundamental aspect in the literature for promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, which is conceived as the process of acquiring, taking – and even the state of – power in the different spheres of people’s activities; *e.g.*, sociocultural, economic and political. Besides this, empowerment is related to strengthening self-esteem and self-confidence.

Batliwala (1997) emphasizes that the trait that most stands out in “empowerment” is that it contains the word “power”. This is also underscored by León (2001)²², and may be defined as control over material goods (physical, human or financial), intellectual resources (knowledge, information and ideas) and ideology (the ability to generate, propagate, sustain, and institutionalize specific sets of beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors). “This control, in turn, confers power of decision-making.”

At the same time, Kabeer (1999) conceives “empowerment” as the “process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability.” This capacity of choice is based on the existence of alternatives, mainly those which are important for living the life chosen; *e.g.* decisions of whether to marry or not and to whom, whether to have children or not and how many. This has three interrelated dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. Resources imply prior conditions and are tangible (physical and financial materials and assets) and intangible (human capital, such as skills, knowledge and experience; social resources such as associations, social networks, etc.). Agency is the capacity to make decisions or to decide what actions to take; for example, defining goals and objectives, and acting upon them. Also, agency implies taking actions that defy power relations. Finally, achievements imply the wellbeing outcomes²³.

Lastly, Vargas and Gambará (2008) state that empowerment is:

²² According to León (2001), power relations may imply domination, challenge and/or resistance to the existing sources of power, or may serve to gain control over them. Zero-sum power is that under which an increase in the power of one person or group is countered by loss of power of the other person or group. And positive-sum power increases the total amount of power available; such power is generative and productive.

²³ The concept of wellbeing in gender literature is somewhat different from wellbeing as defined in economics.

“The process through which people strengthen their individual and collective capacities to take control of their own lives, lay claim on and exercise their rights, promote positive changes in their life situations and become agents of their development [...]. Empowerment is related to access to and control over four types of power: a) cognitive, which implies the understanding that the conditions of subordination of women are not natural, as seen in the analysis of their determining factors, knowledge of the alternatives available for changing the situation in different spheres, and the development of skills for making decisions, solving problems, and foreseeing the consequences of the different actions, and critically analyzing life circumstances, among others; b) psychological, which implies improving the characteristics of security and confidence in one’s own capacities for satisfying one’s needs and for responding to the demands of the environment through overcoming the restrictions imposed by the cultural or ideological messages of oppression and subordination that people receive in relation to themselves and regarding their rights; c) economic, understood as economic independence through access to paid work and control of own income and productive resources; and d) political, which refers to the capacity of people to participate in political structures and collective action for the purpose of influencing decision-making, in the nature of relations, and in the mobilization of institutional rules and resources that foster and defend their own interests.”

In this context, Alsop *et al.* (2006) consider that there are many interpretations of the concept of empowerment. Based on a literature review, they propose a conceptual framework for working from a theoretical basis to a practical one²⁴. Given this basis, they define empowerment as “the process of enhancing an individual’s or a group’s capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then transform those choices into desired actions and results [by the individual or group]”. According to the authors, this capacity is influenced mainly by two groups of factors: agency and the structure of opportunities. Agency is the capacity of individuals or of a certain group to make decisions with a purpose. Furthermore, this capacity is to a considerable degree predictable through the provision of assets; *e.g.*, the economic, social and psychological resources, and political opportunities that individuals have for translating their assets into options and thus become “agents”. However, agency is limited by the structure of opportunities, which corresponds to the aspects of the institutional context; *i.e.* formal and informal rules of the game, that influence in the capacity to transform agency into action.

In the economic sphere, it may be stated that the construction of the concept of “economic empowerment” has its basis in feminist criticism of the development approaches prevailing in the 1980s, based on wellbeing and “anti-poverty”, where consideration was not given to

²⁴ The authors propose a scheme for applying the concept; this is dealt with further on.

structural aspects that perpetuated the oppression and exploitation of low-income women (Moser, 1989, cited by Batliwala, 1997). In this context, Young (1988) – also cited by Batliwala (1997)– mentioned that such approaches did not make a distinction between the “condition” and the “position” of women, with condition being understood as the material conditions in which low-income women find themselves (low salaries, poor nutrition, low levels of education, etc.) and position being conceived as the economic and social status of women as compared to that of men.

In this context, economic empowerment attributes the subordination of women – particularly low-income women – to lack of “economic power” (Batliwala, 1997), which is conceived within the concept of power mentioned previously. Kapitsa (2008), sees economic empowerment as:

“the role of economic resources (particularly material assets) in empowering of women. Some view economic resources as a source of power, and therefore advocate for measures that could affect the distribution of assets within the family, community and/or society at large, with the aim to improving women’s social status and their capability to generate wealth. Some others see material assets only as an empowering condition. The latter approach [...] stresses the importance of access to resources.”

Albeit, this understanding has changed in time, perhaps because it sought a way of linking with economic-productive criteria as such. Regarding this, worth mentioning are some definitions found in the literature:

“Economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth [...] means people thinking beyond immediate survival needs and thus able to recognise and exercise agency and choice” (Eyben *et al.*, 2008).

“A woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions. To succeed and advance economically, women need the skills and resources to compete in markets, as well as fair and equal access to economic institutions. To have the power and agency to benefit from economic activities, women need to have the ability to make and act on decisions and control resources and profits [...] Economic gain and success (economic advancement) promote women’s power and agency. At the same time, when a woman is able to control and share in resource use (power) and to define and make choices (agency), she is better able to advance economically” (Golla *et al.*, 2011).

III.3. Practices towards gender equality and economic empowerment

Seeking gender equality and female empowerment has its basis in the different feminist social movements that have kept up with the valuing of women in the various spheres of society – political, social, economic, etc.

Thus, gender equality was incorporated into the International Human Rights Standards through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approved by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. Following this, the First World Conference on Women was organized in 1975, year which was declared International Women's Year. In 1979, the UN General Assembly approved the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which in its 30 articles explicitly defines discrimination against women and determines a national action roadmap to end it. 1980 was the year of the Second World Conference on Women, held in Copenhagen. The World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women was held in Nairobi in 1985: Equality, Development and Peace, as an answer to the delay in the application of the objectives of the First World Conference on Women (UN, 2020a).

1990 was the year of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action occurred in 1995. The latter asserted the rights of women as human rights and specific actions were delimited for ensuring respect for them. Also, the Rome Declaration of the 1996 World Food Summit stated that the role of women is essential for ensuring food security, as women are the main persons in charge of reproduction within families (cited by Ballara and Parada, 2009).

In 2010, the UN General Assembly created UN Women by merging four international institutions and bodies: the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN 2020a). Presently, UN Women has the objective of developing processes that achieve gender equality and women's empowerment given the essential role that women play in each of the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2020b).

Within this institutional headway, León (2001) points out that there are two trends that have characterized the practices that include women in the quest for equality. The first one is directly related to the UN vision, which allowed going from a concern centered on the role of women within the family to one regarding the protagonist role of women in development. This turn gave way to the trend Women In Development (WID) at the beginning of the 1970s, under the conceptual influence of Boserup (1970) (cited in León, 2001) and under the principal criterion that having historically been excluded from development themes, women represented an

unexploited resource which had to be reintegrated to take advantage of their potential for making contributions. The second trend, known as Gender and Development (GAD), is more recent and emerged together with advancement of the feminist theory, particularly related to the concept of empowerment. GAD recognizes that – through practice and the extensive bibliography that exists – it is not possible to consider women and their problems in isolation; instead, the importance lies in understanding the asymmetric and unjust relations between the genders, with the aim of achieving full citizenship and social democracy.

III.3.1 Gender analysis and approach

Under the context above, gender analysis seeks an understanding, based on the different approximations, of the differences and inequalities in the interrelated lives of women and men, as well as their patterns of power, participation, behavior, and activities within society (Jayasinghe *et al.*, 2019; Jost *et al.*, 2014). The aim is to delimit the transformations that must be prompted to foster gender equality. This analysis must be in agreement with the social reality in which inequalities are generated, taking into consideration the gender relations that establish differences in the relative “position” of women and men (Vargas and Gambará, 2008).

Within its basis of analysis, the gender approach expands to assess the implications of different types of interventions – policies, programs, projects, etc. – and to incorporate into these the gender perspective in design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. In such cases, consideration can be given to other differences of an ethnic, generational and sociocultural nature. The different visions can lead the actions to include some or all of the components aimed partially or solely at women. The incorporation of the gender perspective seeks to achieve transformations and change its definition and discourse in the development sphere to include gender equality as a means and an end (AWID, 2004)²⁵.

Female empowerment is part of the gender analysis and approach, though it has been difficult to put it into practice in the analysis and interventions. Worth mentioning are examples of approximations along these lines. The first, proposed by Alsop *et al.* (2006) considers the analysis scheme presented in Table 1.

²⁵ In the sphere of policies, programs and projects as such, the UNDP (2015) considers that under a gender approach, the actions and results may be: i) Negative, when there were negative consequences that worsened or reinforced gender inequalities and restrictive norms; ii) Insensitive, when they do not take into consideration gender and do not recognize the different needs of women; iii) Guided, when they consider representation or participation by gender; iv) Sensitive, when they deal with the different gender needs and center on the equalitarian distribution of benefits, resources, status, and rights, but without addressing the causes of such inequality; and v) Transforming, when they contribute to changing norms, cultural values and power structures, as well as the origins of inequality and discrimination on the basis of gender.

Table 1. Analysis structure of empowerment

Sphere	Sub-sphere	Determining factors and outcomes										
		Macro level			Intermediate level			Local level				
		A	OS	DOE	A	OS	DOE	A	OS	DOE		
State	Justice											
	Policies											
	Provision of public services											
Market	Employment											
	Goods											
	Private services											
Society	Intra-household											
	Intra-community											

Source: Extracted from Alsop *et al.* (2006)

Notes: A is Agency; OS is opportunity structure; DOE is degree of empowerment.

The opportunity structure (OS) is divided into three main spheres: the State, the market, and society, with these in turn containing subdivisions. These spheres (and subdivisions) are at the macro (national), intermediate and local levels. Agency (A) is determined through the provision of psychological assets; OS is measured through the presence and operation of formal and informal rules in each (sub-) sphere; the degree of empowerment (DOE) is measured through the presence of choice, the use of choice (direct or indirect) and the effectiveness of the choice, which comes from A and OS. Based on this general scheme, a determined type of analysis and intervention may focus on some spheres and levels according to the particular analysis topics, and determine questions and indicators allowing assessment of the levels of A, OS and DOE.

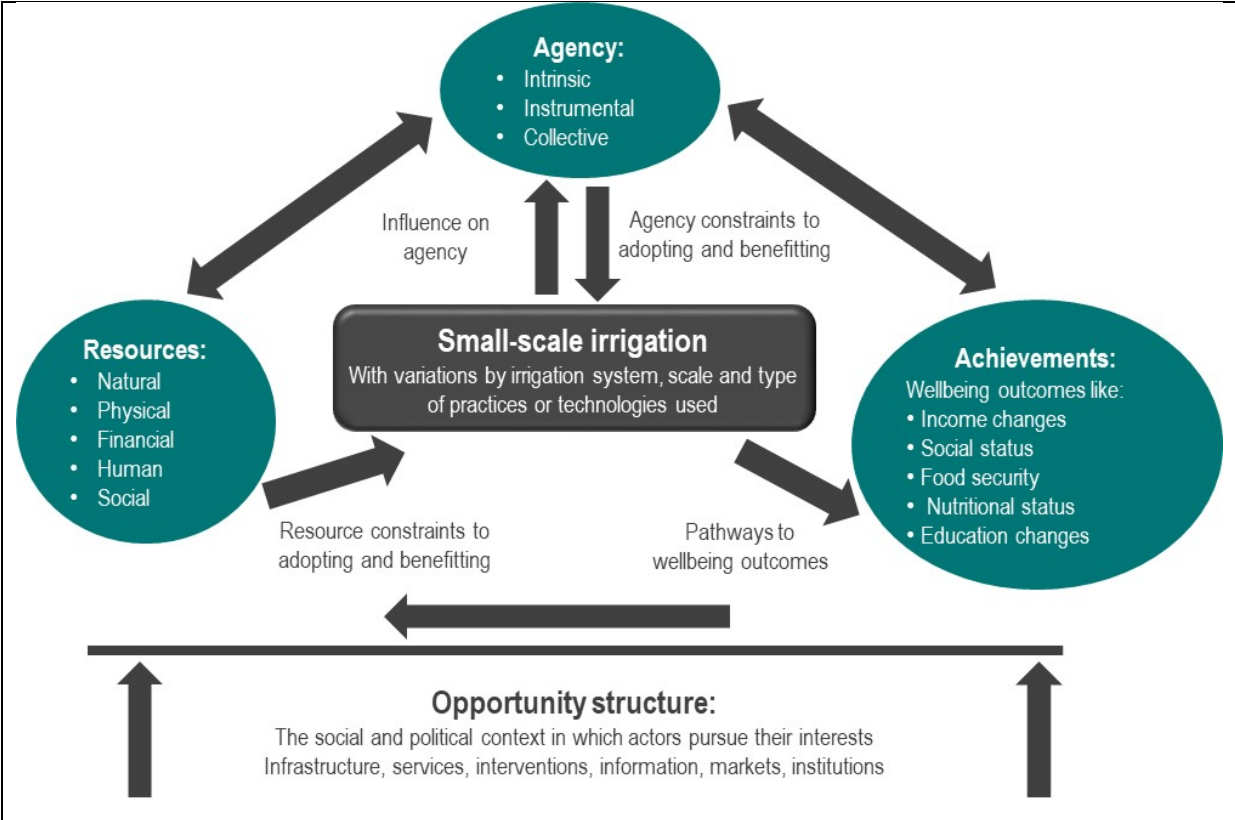
The second approximation of female empowerment was advanced by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) together with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). The approximation develops a methodological framework allowing to quantitatively measure the degree of empowerment of women in the agricultural sector based on questions which are mostly qualitative. Besides this, it allows building a Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index – WEAI (Alkire *et al.*, 2013; Malapit *et al.*, 2015). For measuring the index, five dimensions are established: i) Production, which includes the capacity to make decisions individually or collectively regarding agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing exploitations, particularly in terms of use for consumption and/or trade and as regards autonomy; ii) Productive resources, which also includes property, access and decision-making power on these resources, which

include land, livestock, farm equipment, durable consumption goods, and credit; iii) Monetary income, related to which is also control (individual or collective) of its use in different types of expenses; iv) Leadership, associated with “political” inclusion and participation in the community; and v) Designation of time between productive and household tasks (and the satisfaction obtained from time available for leisure activities).

Lastly, Bryan y Garner (2022) analyze women’s empowerment in the framework of small-scale irrigation projects in the Upper East Region of Ghana, using qualitative data compiled through interviews and focal groups. Figure 3 presents the analysis framework adapted from the conceptualization of empowerment of Kabeer (1999) and Meinzen-Dick *et al.* (2019) (cited by Bryan and Garner, 2022), where small-scale irrigation links with the components of empowerment.

According to the authors, resources and agency are necessary for women to adopt and make use of irrigation (as shown by the arrows). At the same time, irrigation interventions may contribute positively or negatively to agency; *e.g.* on the decisions of agricultural production, income and use of time. Irrigation can also generate wellbeing outcomes (achievements) through agency; *e.g.* in decisions on production. Finally, the relationship between irrigation and women’s empowerment depends to a great degree on the social, political and institutional context (opportunity structure) which delimits the behavior and interactions of men and women.

Figure 3: Analysis framework: Small-scale irrigation and women’s empowerment



Source: Extracted from Bryan and Garner (2022); adapted from Meinzen-Dick *et al.* (2019), making reference to Kabeer (1999)

Based on the mentioned scheme, the authors compiled qualitative information on changes in resources and the decisions, etc. that allow understanding the specific interactions included in Figure 3.

IV. Engaging the concepts of gender in the economic-productive sphere

Given the description of the gender literature summarized here, together with that pertaining to the economic-productive sphere, we show that some concepts of equality and empowerment can engage with each other, but that others are difficult to conciliate.

In terms of gender equality, it is worth recalling that this concept seeks to cover diverse dimensions of development – political, social, cultural, etc. However, specifically in the economic-productive sphere, this definition is not compatible when equal “responsibilities, resources and benefits” are mentioned²⁶. This happens for many and diverse reasons. Some clarifications in terms of this are:

- The delimitation of equal responsibility may restrict preferences and the freedom to choose. For example, a woman’s labor income may be lower than that of her husband; *i.e.*, the responsibilities are unequal in supporting the household because the woman has chosen a career; she may for example be a teacher, which although providing a high level of personal satisfaction, has a labor return lower than that of her partner, who may be a petroleum engineer.
- The delimitation of equal resources assumes that people are homogenous; this has been the subject of criticism in the literature on social wellbeing (see Section II). It is worth recalling for example Sen (1989): The “functionings” of individuals are different, but in society, similar achievements are sought. For “being well fed”, the provision of certain food resources must be different for everyone to have this “functioning”. Besides this, considering that – according to the gender literature – some of these resources are factors of production (such as land and capital), equal tenure of them may or not be desirable from a perspective of greater generation of income (means) for attaining greater wellbeing (aim). The case of the agriculture-livestock sector in Bolivia is an example along these lines: women with salaries²⁷ living in the lowlands earn considerably more than those women who work in their own productive units in the highlands (they are therefore the owners of more productive resources).²⁸

²⁶ It is worth noting that these approaches may be compatible with other spheres of society.

²⁷ Salaried employees in the Bolivian agriculture-livestock sector work on the land of their employers.

²⁸ According to the INE (National Statistics Agency) 2019 Household Survey, agriculture-livestock salaries per hour obtained by women in the lowlands were, on average, 95% higher than per-hour labor income obtained by women in their own agriculture-livestock productive units (whether working on their own, as supervisors, partners or cooperative members).

An additional example is an underlying factor in the decisions between renting or owning an asset, as in some cases the former option may be more profitable than the latter; *e.g.*, renting facilities in food businesses. Under this context, equality of resources by gender may be desirable, to some degree, within an economic-productive context which is similar between men and women; *e.g.*, the same sector and the same region. However, this perspective does not necessarily imply better results in terms of income. In the case of the agriculture-livestock sector of the Bolivian highlands, we stand out that women with salaries have, on average, higher per-hour labor returns than men who work in their own productive units²⁹.

- Retribution is generally very specific to the productive structure and its particular dynamics, efforts and the environment. Once again, in the example of the agriculture-livestock sector comparing the lowlands with the highlands in Bolivia, retribution differs because of, among other factors, the productive characteristics that are particular to the regions. Besides this, in a given zone, the disparities in terms of effort (of labor, use of technology and others) between the productive units generate disparities in retribution. Lastly, although the efforts and the zone may be similar, a different environment, such as extreme weather events or pests, generate inequalities.

The concept of gender equality may engage in the economic-productive sphere with “equality of opportunities”. Also, “equality of rights” may be approximated, in some cases, with “equality of opportunities” or with valuable “functionings”, as per Sen. Some examples in this regard are: the entire population has the right to have at least 12 years of schooling³⁰; two individuals that perform the same activity with the same effort in the same branch of a particular company should have the same remuneration.

In the economic-productive sphere, “equality of opportunities” between genders is important in terms of the choice of whether or not to participate in the workforce, in choices pertaining to how to do it; *e.g.*, being a salaried employee or being independent, working full- or part-time; and even choices in terms of the possibility of quality jobs, be they salaried or not.

The second key concept mentioned in relation to gender is (economic) empowerment of women, which may be related with a part of the economic-productive sphere. In a colloquial but

This is attributable to several factors, such as the quality of land and the economies of scale, which generate disparities in agriculture-livestock productivity between the lowlands and the highlands.

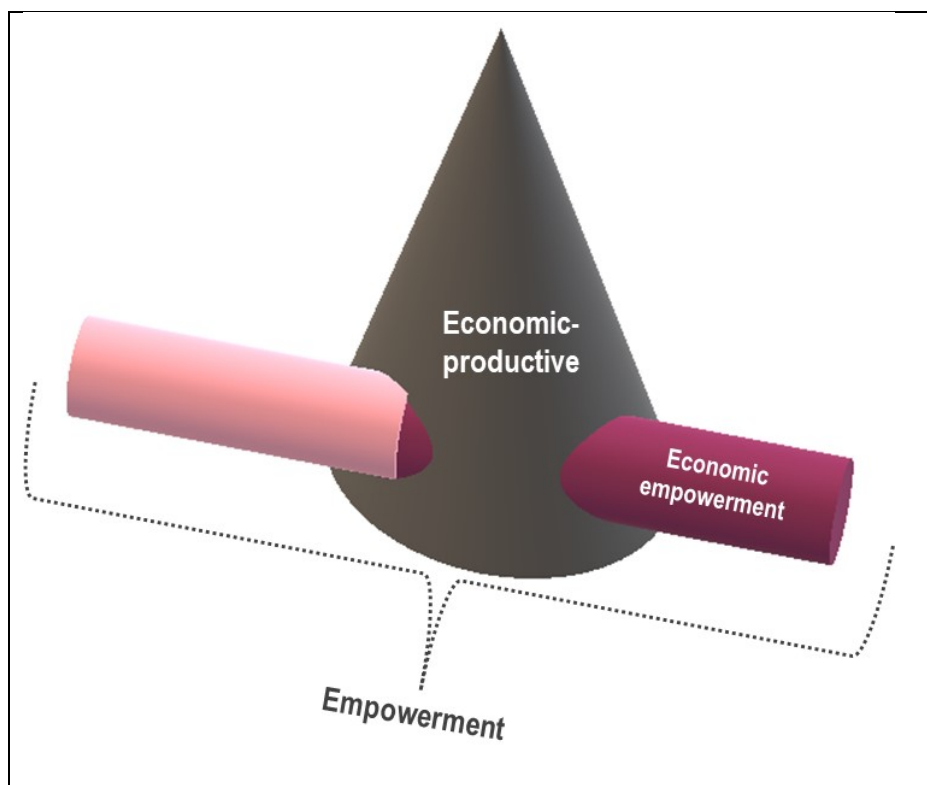
²⁹ According to the INE (National Statistics Agency) 2019 Household Survey, hourly agriculture-livestock salaries obtained by women are 54% higher than the labor income obtained by men in their agriculture-livestock productive units.

³⁰ In the case of Bolivia, this number of years represents graduating from high school.

illustrative manner, Figure 4 shows that each concept may be associated with an own space, where the engagement between the two is represented by the intersection of the spaces.

The aim is the fundamental difference between the two spheres. In terms of female empowerment, the aim is for **women to be empowered**; that is, that they **have “control” over the different types of resources (material, social, intellectual, etc.) to make decisions that result in actions and the achievements that they desire**. In economic-productive terms, the aim is to **have a high level of economic growth that maximizes social wellbeing in a given country**³¹. As previously mentioned, through the national framework a sector level analysis can be done, and even a business analysis, taking into account the wellbeing reached by the actors in a particular productive process (see the example in Figure 1)³².

Figure 4. Economic-productive and empowerment spaces



Source: Own preparation

³¹ It is worth recalling that economic growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for social wellbeing.

³² As mentioned previously, the interrelationships of these actors with others in the sphere of wellbeing itself may be achieved through taxes and compensations.

In these spheres, one element of intersection in Figure 4 is what Kabeer (1999) describes:

“Resources and agency together constitute what Sen refers to as capabilities, the potential that people have for living the lives they want, of achieving valued ways of “being and doing” [...]. Clearly, where failure to achieve valued ways of being and doing can be traced to laziness, incompetence or some other reason particular to an individual, the issue of power is not relevant. It is only when failure to achieve one’s goals reflects some deep-seated constraint on the ability to choose that it can be taken as a manifestation of disempowerment.”

Thus, the concept of empowerment is associated with the debate on social wellbeing (described in Section II) of a person who exercises the role of “consumer”³³. In this case, a state of “disempowerment” implies restricted “capabilities” for choosing the “functionings” desired. For example, for extremely poor women, there is generally no feasible “functioning” for the condition of being “well fed”³⁴. One of these restrictions, in particular, is not necessarily associated with the economic-productive sphere, but rather comes from the social and sociocultural structures that drove women’s oppression and exploitation.

On the other hand, when a woman takes on the role of worker, producer or entrepreneur; *i.e.*, she participates in productive activities, the engagement between empowerment and the economic-productive sphere is more difficult to reconcile. Firstly because of the “control of resources”, which as previously discussed, may be positively related with better wellbeing results through higher income and rent. However, in other cases it is not necessary and/or it is insufficient. Retaking the example of the Bolivian agriculture-livestock sector, it is possible to estimate the WEAI indicator proposed by Alkire *et al.* (2013) and Malapit *et al.* (2015), where it is seen that there are women heads of households in the Bolivian highlands that are empowered and others in the lowlands that are disempowered; *e.g.* they do not own their land or other productive resources³⁵. In these cases, the labor income obtained in the lowlands is higher than in the highlands. Thus, “control over resources” is insufficient for improving the quality of life of the women heads of households of the highlands. Additionally, this “control” may even be

³³ Understood as the consumption of goods and services that make up and do not make up part of the production processes (see Figure 2).

³⁴ All this considered, there are discrepancies in Kabeer’s 1999 definition in terms of the concepts of the economic-productive sphere. In regards to this, two differences are worth noting. Firstly, the “resources” do not correspond to the “capabilities” indicated by Sen, as they are part of a prior step related to the “space” of goods and services, as discussed in Section II. Secondly, the preferences in the economy correspond to the individual choices that maximize utility and are related to the freedom to choose for having a valuable life.

³⁵ In Bolivia, the agrarian reform of 1952 determined that in the highlands (Altiplano), agricultural-livestock breeding families were to own their land individually or communally, and that the land could not be sold and was to be inherited by the successors. In contrast, such reform terms did not apply to the lowlands, because there the land was relatively uninhabited. This region began to be populated in the 1960s and land tenure arose, to a great degree, from the market.

unnecessary if women of the highlands decide, for example, to migrate to the lowlands and work as salaried employees.

Secondly, agency is undoubtedly key in the concept of empowerment, but decision-making in the economic-productive sphere is not necessarily generated based on “control of resources”. For example, there are managers that make a series of decisions on the productive processes of companies, the physical and financial assets of which are not owned by these managers. Besides, this decision-making does not necessarily imply performing actions that challenge the power relations when interacting with other persons; for example, in the case of women who work independently³⁶. Also, in productive units with more than one worker, planning is an important component for success in terms of the expected results, as the most recommended decisions, which translate into objectives and actions, come from the collective construct of what it is beneficial to do and coordinate; *i.e.*, who does what, so as to proceed in the most adequate manner.

It is worth noting that “achievements” in the field of empowerment encompass a broader range of elements than those associated with high economic growth or a particular productive process, and the resulting income and rent. However, as mentioned, in the economic-productive sphere, these “achievements” are not necessarily associated with power. Besides this, the variables of the environment or location are very important for delimiting its level, as the “achievements” can to some degree be related to the opportunity structure mentioned by Alsop *et al.* (2006). In many cases the “achievements” are limited by exogenous factors; *e.g.*, climate variability, war and pandemics such as COVID-19.

Lastly, worthwhile to mention is that the engagement, to some degree, of some concepts of economic empowerment in the economic-productive sphere is sought. Eyben *et al.* (2008) expand the definition of inclusive growth indicated by Kakwani and Pernia (2000) to include, among others, the exercising of agency. However, this deviates from the conceptual basis of empowerment, since, for example, “participating” and “benefiting” are somewhat different from “having power”³⁷. Golla *et al.* (2011) associate economic empowerment with entrepreneur women who have their own productive units, but this implies the exclusion of those who are not part of this category; *e.g.*, salaried women, be they employees or managers, as well as the business environment, which may limit the success they mention.

³⁶ That is, they are the only ones who work in the productive unit. According to the INE (National Statistics Agency) 2019 Household Survey, women represented 34.5% of the working population in the Bolivian agriculture-livestock sector.

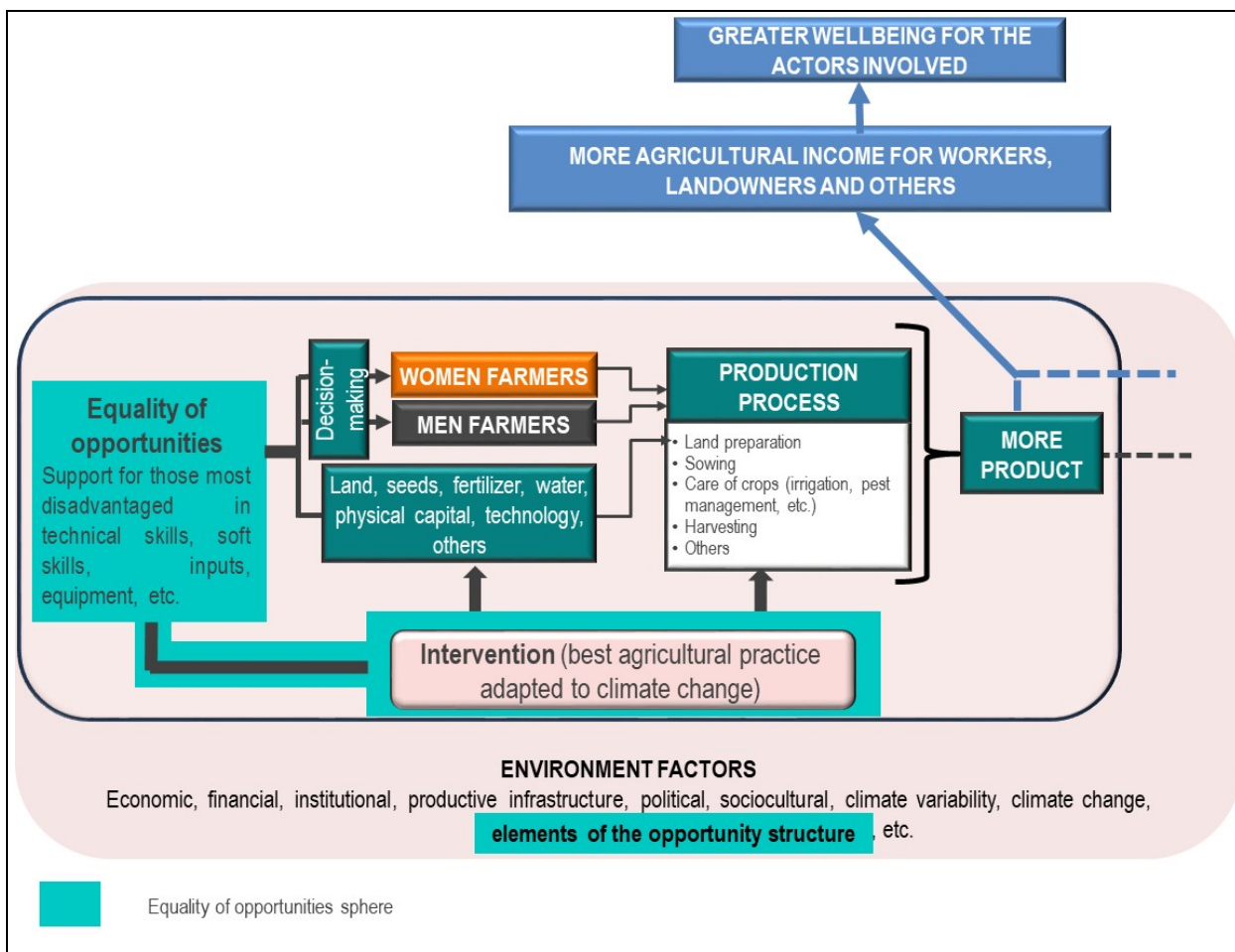
³⁷ That is, it does not properly fulfill the Aristotelian’s principle of non-contradiction.

IV.1. Application of the case of agricultural production

According to what was previously discussed, **equality of opportunities** corresponds to the most compatible engagement between the spheres of gender equality and the economic-productive space, which is also associated with inclusive growth.

Figure 5 presents an example of conciliation of an intervention of “best agricultural practices adapted to climate change” (fertilization of soil, irrigation, etc.) for producers of small productive units in a given community of the Bolivian Altiplano. Here the purpose is to increase yield for improving the income of the actors involved, and consequently their quality of life.

Figure 5: Spheres of gender and the economic-productive space in an agricultural sector intervention



Source: Own preparation

The approach of **equality of opportunities** implies aiding persons that are part of the farming families and/or farmers of the productive units, as well as all those who wish to participate in the intervention. As to the elements needed as the basis for the implementation, the aid must be differentiated, favoring those who are most disadvantaged. Some examples are teaching technical skills and specific soft skills, as well as the purchase or improvement of inputs and equipment so that the productive units may carry out the intervention. Under this framework, considering that there are gender gaps affecting women in this sphere, they are to be the ones receiving the most support.

Lastly, this approach may also be associated, to a certain degree, with empowerment. On the one hand, the generation of soft skills (such as team work, entrepreneurial spirit and business leadership) can promote more equitable decision-making by gender, even though this may not adhere, strictly speaking, to the feminist concept of agency. Additionally, among the factors of environment, it is possible to include an analysis by gender relevant to the intervention with the aim of seeking strategies for mitigating possible restrictions in the framework of the opportunity structure. For example, there may be informal rules that limit the participation of women in the intervention.

v. Conclusions

This study analyzes the economic-productive and gender equality conceptual frameworks with the aim of establishing theoretical-practical lines allowing to progress towards an engagement between the two spheres.

In the literature review pertaining to the economic-productive space, it is underscored that a high level of economic growth is desirable, though it is not an end in itself, but rather a means for maximizing social wellbeing or the quality of life of individuals through an increase in production, income, and hence consumption.

Growth is not a sufficient means for solving the problems of inequality in society. For this reason, in the literature on social wellbeing, there has been extensive debate on the types of inequalities sought to be resolved. Acknowledging that people are heterogenous in their preferences, their decisions, their actions, and their achievements has led to proposing two fundamental visions of equality. The first, proposed by Sen, states that although the population is diverse, it is necessary to have certain “functionings” that are valuable for society; that is, equality in results must be sought in certain fundamental dimensions such as “being well fed” and “being literate”. The second vision is that of equal opportunities, which, on its part, aims to acknowledge that a society cannot make individuals equally content, and that therefore it is necessary to promote the same opportunities for reaching the results that each individual chooses and decides to take

advantage of. This second approach is particularly important because it is associated to the concept of inclusive growth.

In relation to the literature review on gender, it is observed that the concept of equality in general, and of (economic) empowerment in particular, is broad and versatile, possibly because the aim is for it to act as the umbrella that guides the different spheres of interrelations between men and women. On the one hand, gender equality takes into consideration parity of rights, responsibilities, opportunities, resources, and retribution between women and men. Additionally, women's empowerment represents a process of acquisition and status – as a means and an end – of power in the different spheres of the activities of people. Power implies possessing and controlling resources of a material, intellectual and ideological nature, among others, which in turn confer the power to decide, or “agency”. On its part, agency allows performing actions that challenge the power relations to achieve what is desired.

This being said, agency is also limited by the opportunity structure, which is society's formal and informal rules of the game.

It is worth noting that gender equality and women's empowerment seek to be pertinent above all in practice; that is, in the implementation of policies, programs and projects that allow progressing towards these objectives. This has led to the implementation of a series of measures at the global level, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, up to becoming an intrinsic part of the Sustainable Development Goals. This practice represents not only a gender analysis allowing greater awareness on the subject, but also implementation of the gender approach in interventions – policies, programs, project, etc.

Within this framework, the analysis shows that there are some elements of gender equality that may be engaged into the economic-productive space – from a theoretical and practical perspective – while others are more difficult to reconcile. As to seeking gender equality, it is observed that this is incompatible with equaling “responsibilities, resources and retribution”, for different reasons which are discussed in the debate on social wellbeing in economics. Regarding this, it is worthwhile to note that the delimitation of equal responsibilities may restrict preferences and the freedom to choose. Seeking similar resources is not the necessary condition, nor is it a sufficient condition for improving social wellbeing coming from the consumption of goods and services. Seeking the same retribution between men and women means implicitly assuming that the structures, inputs, productive dynamics, and environment variables are equal in all economic sectors, which is impossible to sustain. Albeit, gender equality can be engaged in the economic-productive sphere with “equality of opportunities” and may be approximated in certain cases with “equality of rights”.

As regards women's (economic) empowerment, it is observed that the fundamental difference is in the aim. In this case, the end is for women to be empowered, while in the economic-productive sphere, high economic growth is sought – or, at the micro level, high sectoral or business growth – to have higher income and rent allowing to improve the quality of life of the actors involved.

This being said, both spheres can be engaged, to a certain degree, when a woman exercises the role of consumer. In this case, a condition of disempowerment is related to a restriction of “capabilities” in terms of selecting the “functionings” that are desired, even though this role is not associated solely with the consumption of goods and services produced, but also with those that are not produced and that are not traded in the market.

The engaging of both spheres is more difficult to reconcile when a woman takes on the role of worker, producer or entrepreneur. This is due that a high level of economic-productive performance for a particular woman does not imply that she is empowered, as empowerment does not imply that she has a high level of economic-productive achievement, though there may certainly be a positive relationship between the two.

Lastly, the document proposes an example in the agricultural sphere, where a given intervention that seeks to increase yield (for generating greater income) may harmonize very well with equality of opportunities by gender. This approach implies aiding members of families of women and/or men farmers in productive units who wish to participate in the intervention, with a differentiated perspective that favors those most in need, who may be mostly women. The approach may also be associated, to a certain degree, with empowerment: on the one hand, the generation of skills facilitates decision-making, and on the other, the environment factors may be included in the intervention as a component of its principal objective; e.g., in an environment of informal rules that limit the participation of women in the intervention.

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