GWA GENDER AND WATER ALLIANCE

Empowerment

Four Interacting Elements for Analysis and as an Objective for Development

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Introduction

Despite decennia of global and national efforts and money to eliminate poverty and promote social equity and sustainable development, a large proportion of the global population still faces unacceptable levels of discrimination, exploitation, and abuse in availing their basic human rights. They are unable to access resources and assets needed for a decent life, and are unable to play an active part in political and decision-making processes that vitally affect them. There is wide-spread recognition now that not only is this morally and ethically wrong, but it severely undermines any efforts towards achieving sustainable and equitable growth. This recognition is in fact embedded in the recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) where empowerment is seen as necessary to the achievement of many of the goals, and which includes a stand-alone goal on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls especially.

But empowerment is not only about doing the right thing, it is about getting a bigger and more informed picture of the agency and capacities and contributions of the less-visible: women and girls, ethnic minorities, indigenous groups, lower castes, and other marginalized groups who make enormous contributions in unpaid care work, household food security, and local environmental management. This will help in better use of human and social capital and more effective allocation of productive resources and assets for sustainable development. Empowerment is also about getting voices heard that were not heard before– so they can negotiate, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives and future. This only can lead to a systemic and transformative change in the unequal power relations in a society, and pave the way for a development agenda that represents the interests of women and men of different class, caste, ethnicity, age, and ability.

This paper[1] will concisely explain the empowerment approach used by the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA) in its work, and specifically outline and illustrate some practical ways to apply this methodology in capacity building trainings, and as a tool for analysis and monitoring of development project interventions.

What is Empowerment?

Empowerment is a process of change, enabling people to make choices and convert these into desired actions and results. In doing so, people - not just women - take control of their own lives, improve their own position, set their own agenda, gain skills, develop self-confidence, solve problems, and develop self-sufficiency. Empowerment leads to genuine participation of all actors as it is a process of gaining self-confidence for individual development as well as to contribute towards development of others. Empowerment refers to increasing the economic, social, political, and physical strength of any individual or entity.

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[1] This paper is one of a series of papers on methodologies used by the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA), and forms part of their methodology toolkit for the Gender and Water Programme Bangladesh (GWAPB). For more information on GWA and GWAPB please see http://genderandwater.org/en/bangladesh

When we assess the level of empowerment of an individual or a group, we look at the following four interrelated elements:

1. **Physical empowerment:**
   The right to decide about one's sexuality, to decide about the number of children and spacing between them, the right to family planning methods and information to choose contraceptives are all aspects of physical empowerment. Also the right to proper healthcare, to clean water, sanitation facilities and dignity, access to proper menstrual management contribute to this element of empowerment. Furthermore, the ability to resist violence, the right to safety and security, and the power to get one's rights are very important aspects.

2. **Economic empowerment:**
   This is the right to access to and control over relevant resources of production, the right to safe and sufficient water, same income for same work for men and women, the right to decide about the use of one's own income, the right to choose one's education, and the right to get decent work out of it. Often women have access to income but have no control over it, they have to hand over their salaries to husband, son, brother or mother in law. It is also commonly known that millions of women and girls lose out on income and education due to the time they spend in provisioning of drinking water for their families.

3. **Political empowerment:**
   This is the right to organize one self and others, the right to take part in democratic processes: to be allowed to vote and to be voted for. It means to participate at the decision making levels not only at national level, but also to take active part in Water User Associations (WUA), Small Farmers Groups (SFG), credit groups, and their Executive Committees or boards. In means to participate in society and to be able to make one's voice heard. For example to be confident in getting extension services from the local level Agricultural Extension office, or to be a member of the Union Parishad and effectively participate in decision-making to influence development efforts.

Some Indicators of Empowerment

- ❖ Having decision making power of one's own and for others.
- ❖ Access to information and knowledge to make informed decisions.
- ❖ Control of resources like money, land; assets to contribute to economic production and to be economically independent
- ❖ Mobility – freedom of safe and secured movement, without fear.
- ❖ Skills to contribute to economic production and for social participation.
- ❖ A positive self-image and overcoming stigma assigned to the category one belongs to.
- ❖ Ability to bargain and negotiate for one's rights and for a better position.
- ❖ Strong level of confidence: "I can do this".
- ❖ Being respected and treated fairly by others

4. **Socio-cultural empowerment[2]:**
   This is the right to one's own independent identity and is about your perception of yourself and how society perceives you. It means to have a positive self-image, and is about your social status as an individual and as a group. For example as a woman, and as a member of a particular ethnic group or caste. Furthermore, it is about the right and ability to speak out, getting your voice heard, and making your opinion matter.

All four elements of empowerment are interrelated and together they indicate the degree of empowerment of an individual or group. It is important to realize that any single one of these four elements should not be seen as empowering in isolation, as the four elements interact and influence each other. So, for example, having a job (economic empowerment) in itself does not mean a woman is empowered if she has no say in who she would like to marry or the number of children she would like to have (physical empowerment).

Supporting Empowerment

If we look at the four elements of empowerment and its indicators, we see that fewer women than men in our society achieve those. Some major reasons for this are the patriarchal attitude, cultural and societal barriers, and lack of political commitment. The many qualities that women do possess are often not recognized by society. Women hardly have access to necessary resources to be empowered. As a result sustainable development gets hampered because qualities and work of women are not recognized, utilized and tapped.

Nobody can empower another person. One can only empower oneself to make decisions, express views, and change behavior and practices. Groups and individuals (not only women) who are on the lower side of the hierarchy, empower themselves if they are convinced, and if they are able to do so.

Outsiders (like project staff) can be catalysts and create enabling opportunities for women and men from different cultures and socio-economic groups to empower themselves following their own needs, values and strategy. They can do this by raising awareness of groups and individuals about their rights, building their capacity for change through appropriate education and skills training; as well as through advocacy for improved laws, policies and regulations on access to resources.

> The empowerment of one category of people should not be at the cost of the empowerment of others: equal rights will reduce the power differences at global, national, and local levels, engage the skills and capacities of a diversity of people, and generally increase well-being of all.

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[2] This element is also referred to as social empowerment

Empowerment as a Method for Analysis

As empowerment is essential to equitable and sustainable development, the concept can be used as a method of analysis and a tool for tracking change. In training workshops it can be used to show water professionals how their technical intervention impact people, in case studies it can show which impact the intervention has had on the lives of poor and vulnerable groups, and by formulating indicators changes in degrees of empowerment can be monitored.

In Training Workshops

For water professionals with a technical background it is not always clear how their designs and constructions can have different impact on the lives of the various end users. A capacity building workshop on gender and water for such professionals where one session/module including a practical exercise is dedicated to the empowerment concept can be instrumental in explaining this.

Firstly, the empowerment concept and its four elements can be explained to participants using a power point presentation combined with an interactive discussion on what constitutes social-cultural, economic, political, and physical empowerment for them. It is good to encourage participants to use examples from their own work and lives in this discussion, as this helps them to connect the theoretical concept to their professional context. When time permits a fun and interactive exercise called the 'Power Walk'[3] can be done, where participants learn how development interventions impact the lives and power positions of different people in different ways – empowering some, while disempowering others.

To illustrate how this learning can be used in the practical context of the participants' work, a half day field visit can be organized to apply the concept and to see how it relates to water

Mobility as an indicator of empowerment: Female and male community mobilisation staff in southwest coastal Bangladesh

management. During the visit the workshop participants are divided into four groups, whereby the groups are asked to focus on one of the elements of empowerment each: either physical empowerment, economic empowerment, political empowerment or socio-cultural empowerment. The workshop participants are encouraged to talk to local people from different backgrounds and in different positions to get an insight into their different levels of empowerment for the element they are focusing on. Even though they focus on one element of empowerment, participants are encouraged to observe the interrelation of the different elements.

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[3] For some examples of this exercise can be found in the training reports available at
http://genderandwater.org/en/bangladesh/gwapb-products/capacity-building

Economic empowerment: woman running a grocery shop in southwest coastal Bangladesh

Another possibility is to ask each group of participations to talk to a specific group of people, for example a Village Wash Committee (VWC) and focus on analysing all the elements of empowerment for this particular group.

Each group is instructed to make notes so that no important information and observations are lost. They are also asked to take photographs of the people interviewed, after seeking their consent, as well as local scenes as this delivers extra information for their analysis and presentation.

After returning from the field visit a general plenary session is organized wherein the participants present their findings per group using flipcharts, and to share their observations. The other groups are invited to give comments and feedback on what is presented, and discuss the findings. This allows for peer learning and shared learning between the water professionals which is very much appreciated. At the end of this session participants are knowledgeable about how water management and related technical interventions can empower some women and men while they can disempower other people based on their class, age, ethnic background, ability, and even geographic location.

An example of how a field visit can be conducted is given on the following pages in "Field Visit to a WASH project site in Gazipur".

Tool for empowerment: Knowledge

Field Visit to a WASH Project Site in Gazipur

In a workshop organized by GWA PB for selected professionals, all the participants visited the BRAC WASH project area in Kapasia, Gazipur. With the objective to do a situational analysis based on the 4 elements of empowerment (social, economic, political and physical), participants of the workshop were divided into 4 groups who had conversations with different groups of people. Group 1 had a conversation with the Village WASH committee, Group 2 talked with members of the Male Forum, Group 3 had a discussion with the Women Cluster members; while Group 4 conversed with the members of the Adolescent Girls Forum. The respondents spoke freely with the different workshop groups, who tried to understand how the BRAC WASH Programme was contributing and/or influencing the social, economic, political and physical empowerment of women, children, and men in the area.

Findings of Group 1: Village WASH Committee

A Village WASH Committee consists of eleven members of various groups and trades. Only the person who can dedicate enough time to the committee for improvement of safe water, sanitation and hygiene in the village is considered eligible to be elected as the president. Union Parishad members and women members in their own area are selected as advisers of the Village WASH Committee. The group did a transect walk to understand the social empowerment situations. Villagers (both women and men) are now aware of sanitation and water issues.

There were many indicators of the project having a positive influence on the **Social Empowerment** of women, men, and children in the area. There is increased male and female participation in decision making, and reduced incidence of early marriage of girls. Women, especially, are more socially aware than before the project, and raise their voice about social issues. Women are enjoying improved social prestige and dignity. There is an increased probability of sustainability of Village WASH Committee because of male and female participation.

The project has also positively contributed to the **Economic empowerment** of women and men. Women are engaged in income earning activities, and can spend their earnings independently. There is a reduced incidence of water borne diseases, and so less medical expenses. Now women have access to water resources, both for agricultural and household activities, and the income level of both women and men has increased. The level of education of men and women has improved compared to earlier, and while women's movement outside their area is still limited, they are more mobile than before the project began.

As regards **Political empowerment,** there is more participation of women and men in the local government, and their involvement in the VWC has helped to increase their self-confidence. VWC is now able to minimize any conflict in their community, and they reach consensus with respect to selection of vulnerable beneficiaries. Women and men raise their voices, and are expressive.

The project has also contributed to **Physical empowerment** of the local people, and especially of women as violence against women and incidence of sexual harassment has reduced. All family members enjoy better health as the incidence of water borne diseases has reduced, and there is increased access to safe water for them

Findings of Group 2: The Male Forum

Group 2 met with almost 25 members of the Male Forum. Every man in the project area is allowed to attend the session. They are encouraged to share the learning in the family later on. The session we observed was mostly about WASH. The field facilitator followed a specific training manual to conduct the field session.

Social Empowerment

The men said that their female family members participate more in decision making in their households due to project activities. They are more mobile and less dependent on their menfolk now, for household-related shopping, for example. They thought that women now have better access to education, and there is no incidence of early marriage of girls, divorce, and dowry practice. Wives now share their opinion with their husbands, but still lack the power (and consent of their men) to carry them out. Men say they share their knowledge and experience from the project activities, with their female family members, particularly with their wives. They implement their learning together with respect to their daughters' education, marriage, health and hygiene, etc.

Economic Empowerment

From speaking to the men, the participants thought that although women are involved in income generating work, they lack the power to decide how to use the money earned. Social and religious barriers tend to restrict women from working outside their home, and women have to wear a 'burkha' (headscarf and veil). While women have some access to resources, their right to properties and legal documents is almost nil. It is also women who are responsible for most of the drudgery work including collecting fire-wood for cooking.

Political Empowerment

Women are not free to support or vote for the political party of their choice, and although they cast a vote the choice is often made for them by the male members in the family. Some women are members of groups set up as part of the project.

Physical Empowerment

Men can choose who they marry while women can't. Also women cannot decide on family planning issues, even though they bear the responsibility of contraception. Wives get help from their husbands for health-related expenses, and are not required to do any hazardous or heavy work when they are pregnant. Most women have access to safe water e.g., deep tube well, submergible pump, as well as access to sanitary facilities. The male forum members mentioned that most women do not experience any torture or physical abuse, and feel quite secure. Women are still lacking awareness on hygienic menstrual management.

Findings of Group 3: The Women's Cluster

Meetings of the women's cluster committee at the village of Nakachini, Kapashia, Gazipur, are conducted by designated field staff, and key messages on good hygiene behaviour are shared. To make sure that all the households in a given village receive the information conveyed, the meetings are organised in small groups and the participation of members from each invited household is ensured. Almost 13 women attended the session and shared their views and learnings. Out of the 10 women in the cluster, only 4 talked to the participants.

Social empowerment: From their discussion with the 4 women, the participants gathered that women participate in family decision making processes, feel more self-confident, and can air their opinion freely. The women feel their social bargaining power has increased, and that they have more mobility to access the market, and for health care, personal, educational, and community needs.

However further questioning revealed that although women are aware of girl's right to education, only 3 out of 10 girls from their area actually attend school, and only two girls of the village have completed their higher education. The prevalence of early marriage of girls is still common here, and the women mentioned 14 – 15 years as being the normal age for girls to marry. Women do not feel safe in this area and parents fear for the safety of their daughters. They hope that this situation will change with the influence of media, work of NGOs, and education contributing to a change in the attitude of men.

Economic empowerment: participants found that some women said they are participating much more in family budget preparation and resource allocation now than 8 – 10 years ago, due to increased knowledge and information. Women also save money, and have some freedom to spend in certain cases. They are involved more in homestead gardening for their own use. However women's participation in income generating activities is still very limited, and they are mostly dependent on their husband's income for household expenses.

Political empowerment: Women were found to be aware of their right to vote, but lacked relevant information for this, and hardly participated in political events and campaigns. While they did have opportunities to participate in, and organize group and community meetings, their involvement in the local government bodies was very low, and they felt they lacked political bargaining power.

Physical empowerment: participants found that although women said they were more mobile, they feared for their and their daughters' personal safety outside the home. Women said they had better Information and access to health care, and had knowledge on family planning, yet were not able to decide on contraception. They had no power to decide on birth spacing, and early marriage of girls is still very common here. On the positive side, women said the incidence of domestic violence was less than before.

Group 4: The Nakachini Village Adolescent Girls Group

This is a 7- year old group with 22 members at present. They organize group meetings every 3-4 months and the group has held 28 meetings since its formation. The subjects of discussions are hand washing hygiene, water sealed sanitary latrines, menstrual management, girls education, child marriage, dowry, personal health and hygiene management, water borne diseases, reproductive health, cervical cancer, nutrition, etc. During the discussion with the girls' it was seen that some of them participated and talked much more than others.

Social Empowerment: Girls feel good because of their increased knowledge, and proudly share their learning with their family members. They think their health has improved and medical expenditure has decreased compared to earlier. The girls are knowledgeable about water management and sanitation practices, and provided us an example of this: keeping the water jar on a raised place so that children don't put their hand in the jar. The girls mentioned that their brothers also help their mother in chopping vegetable, and that girls get to eat as much food as their brothers. However when some girls said that when

any food is left over, families offer this to the girls as well, the workshop participants found this difficult to believe. The girls were also involved in a protest about a child marriage at Naranpur of Sreepur Upazila, and play an important role to prevent child marriage and dowry in their community. They all go to school.

Economic empowerment: The girls are able to get their voices heard in terms of food, nutrition, personal care. The girls are dressed fashionably, have mobile phones, and can afford to visit beauty parlours.

The girls are also **politically empowered** as they have the capacity to organize themselves, and campaign successfully to stop human rights violation, like child marriages. They also exert a positive influence on the political attitudes of their family, neighbourhood, and school children and teachers.

Participating in the Forum has also contributed to the **physical empowerment** of the girls as they are aware about personal health, hygiene, cleanliness, and are able to manage themselves during their menstrual periods. They have information about reproductive health, maternity, food, nutrition, and can use this to inform their parents on how to prevent and treat diseases, and how to live a healthy life. The girls are also aware of the consequences of child marriage, and are actively contributing to reducing its prevalence in their village.

Conclusions Drawn from the Group Findings from the Field Visit, on How Project Activities Have Influenced the Empowerment of the Local Women, Men, and Children

Social empowerment: Participation of both women and men increase the institutional sustainability of an organization, e.g., Village WASH Committee. Awareness and conscious efforts of both women and men are important to get out of social vices like violence against women, child marriage, dowry, etc. Skills and education make women and men better equipped to deal with life's uncertainties.

Economic empowerment: Women's control over income raises their confidence, improves their family living situation, and their savings reduces the negative impact of economic and social shocks/crises that the family face from time to time. Women have a better say in family decision-making, and their indigenous knowledge (knowledge about water sources, agricultural seeds, etc.) and skills contributes to economic and social sustainability of the family and village.

Political empowerment: The opportunity to participate in decision making and freedom to express their opinion enhances women's self-confidence. This increases probability of women living a life of dignity and prestige along with their male counterparts.

Physical empowerment: A life with freedom of choice (about marriage, family planning, education, occupation etc.) and free from threat, violence and humiliation is humiliation is important for women and men to live and contribute better in development.

The empowerment concept can be very useful tool of analysis in conducting case studies and qualitative research. It will indicate up to which level the target group has managed to profit from the project[4] and what activities or interventions of the project have been contributing to or enabling the improvement.

This is done in the following 5 steps:

1. Define the group you want to study
2. Assess the level of empowerment before and after the project of the group you study
3. Determine the factors which contributed to empowerment
4. Analyse which interventions of the project have enabled or contributed to these factors
5. Conclude which measures can be taken for further progress

These steps are elaborated below, and the Case Study on Gender and Empowerment through WASH is included at the end of this section as an example for better understanding.

Define the group you want to study
Development efforts mostly target poor and or vulnerable people and often use geographical defined areas to implement projects. If you would like to study the effect or impact of the project it is important to realize that the people targeted by the project is not a homogenous group. Some people will have benefitted more from the project than others and some people will not have been involved at all. So before you start you have to make explicit which group of people you would like to focus your case on and justify why you made this choice. You can make a distinction between different people targeted by the project (e.g. men/women, old/young, rich/poor, different ethnic groups, etc) to find out who benefitted most, but you can also make a comparison with people that were not involved in the project.

Assess the level of empowerment before and after the project of the groups you study
First define some relevant indicators for physical, economic, political and socio-cultural empowerment such as:
- Level of education
- Marital status, number of children,
- Profession
- Income and assets
- Access and control over drinking water and sanitation
- Access and control over means of production
- Membership of groups and institutions like water user groups/ political parties/ farmer co-operatives /trade unions/ Union Parishad, etc
- Membership of executive committees or executive functions like chair, secretary, treasurer
- Respect shown by other people
- Pride in oneself
- Confidence in oneself

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[4] For the sake of readability the word project will be used in this document to refer to both programmes and projects

Gather data through interviews, literature research and project documents on these indicators before and after the project. Answer the following questions: What has changed? What was the biggest change? How did the different elements of empowerment interact and reinforce each other?

Determine the factors which contributed to empowerment
Once you know where an increase in empowerment took place, you determine why this has been possible. Often you will find that the attitude of the empowered person or group is the most determining factor for empowerment, or that there were some advantages they had above others that made it possible to empower themselves more than others. Especially when comparing different groups of people to find out who benefitted more or less from the project, it is important to find out why some were in a better position to make use of the opportunities offered than others.

Analyse which interventions of the project have enabled or contributed to the increase in empowerment
As no-one can empower somebody else, this also holds true for projects and programmes. Projects can provide opportunities or an enabling environment by raising awareness, providing knowledge or information, providing better access to and control of resources, by putting in place improved policies and regulations and advocating for improved laws, etc. In this step you try to analyse which actions of the project have helped in the increase of the empowerment of the different groups you are looking at Which activities were beneficial for physical empowerment, and did they benefit all, or just a (few) group(s) of people? And which activities contributed to economic empowerment? Which activities contributed to all or most of the elements of empowerment? And which activities were most important in this respect, and which activities were less supportive?

Tools for empowerment: Mobile phone

Conclude which measures can be taken for further progress
Based on the factors and interventions identified in step 3 and 4, you can look critically at the aims of your project and conclude which steps you should take next to improve the impact of your project. The analysis will give you insight into which measures have been most useful for which group of people, and it also indicates where you could do more or maybe change your focus to another group of people.
However it is important to keep in mind that even though projects can provide opportunities for people to use to empower themselves, if the opportunities are not used the project cannot ensure empowerment.

In the "Case Study on Gender and Empowerment through WASH" conducted by GWA and SIMAVI, the empowerment concept was used as a tool for analysis. To illustrate the steps of analysis, the corresponding text from the report is used as an example.

The full report is available at http://genderandwater.org/en/bangladesh/gwapb-products/knowledge-development/research-report/case-study-on-gender-and-empowerment-through-wash/view

Step 1: Define the group you want to study

While the WASH Alliance in Bangladesh has been very successful in forming many WASH committees with an impressive number of female members, only a few members have shown signs of leadership and seem to get a recognizable voice in their community and in relation to the government authorities. Therefore the study focused on 6 women who project staff believed to be more empowered through their participation in WASH committees and other WASH interventions, than other women in the same intervention.

Step 2: Assess the level of empowerment before and after the project of the groups you study

"In all of the six cases studied, physical empowerment has increased. In every case the women mention the improved health due to construction of latrines, access to safe drinking water and training on health and sanitation issues. This health improvement goes beyond the individual level of the women part of the case study, but extends through-out their villages or wards. ... So the WASH interventions have certainly contributed to the physical empowerment of women in the cases presented. It seems that physical empowerment has increased in general and that the five women we studied did not become more physically empowered than the other women that benefitted from the interventions."

"Some economic empowerment has taken place because as a result of the improved WASH facilities, water borne diseases have decreased in all cases, especially diarrhea. This has resulted in women having to spend less time on caring for the sick and in less money being spent on doctors' bills. ... economic empowerment did increase slightly due to the health benefits, but that to obtain this a lot of time had to be invested by the women[5], which is not compensated financially and not even regarded as an investment by themselves. The other initiatives regarding economic empowerment are relatively recent (the production of sanitary napkins) or were abandoned (revolving fund), so in this respect economic empowerment did not take place (yet)."

"In all of the six cases studied, political empowerment has increased. ... the increase in visible participation at different levels. Several fora have been established where women actively participate like the Community Health Development Groups, Ward Health Development Committees, Union Health Development

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[5] In the projects the women spent a lot of time on attending meetings and trainings as well as doing voluntary work. They did not consider this as work or investment themselves

Committee, Health Village committee, Budget Monitoring Club, Water Users Groups and Mother's Parliament. In these committees the president, secretary and treasurer positions, as well as the "vocal persons" in the Mothers' Parliament and focal persons for development of thematic areas are led by women at village and union level. ... Women are confidently and actively participating at decision making levels (Executive Committee), to ensure services from the local level representatives of national departments like DPHE, Upazila and Union Parishad, Schools, Family, Health and Welfare services, Agricultural Extension Office. Besides, they are the member representative from their constituency at different Standing Committees of the Union Parishads and effectively participate in decision-making to influence development efforts."

"In all cases it is very clear that both the self-confidence of the women as well as the esteem for them by others has increased a lot. Like with the element of physical empowerment, socio-cultural empowerment has also increased for women that were not part of the case study. Due to the activities of the women in the committees, they have created an environment where women's leadership is now more socially accepted, benefitting all women. Women are more respected in general as they have shown to have important knowledge and to be able to achieve important changes benefitting the lives of local people."

Step 3: Determine the factors which contributed to empowerment

From the limited number of cases it appears that the most determining factor for empowerment is the attitude of the woman (or man) herself (himself). The following factors have influenced the possibility of the women to take the opportunities offered:

- Motivation, determination and willingness to work hard without direct (financial) benefit to the woman herself
- Level of education
- Encouragement by husband and relatives to be active
- Social status within society (good family, profession)
- Financial situation
- Mobility
- Talent & leadership skills

Step 4: Analyse which interventions of the project have enabled or contributed to the increase in empowerment

In the cases we have studied, the project provided an enabling environment in several ways:

- *Targeting women specifically to become involved in WASH-interventions.*
  This strategy has been very helpful for empowering the women in the project area in general. It gave them the opportunity to come forward and show their knowledge and skills with respect to WASH.

…This has provided opportunities for many women in the area and has contributed to their general empowerment

- *Providing knowledge and information on health, sanitation and rights through several techniques: court-yard sessions, training workshops, posters, leaflets and banners, exposure visits.*
  The increase of knowledge on health and sanitation of the women in the interventions has especially been helpful for their physical empowerment. By using Participatory Monitoring Tools … has led to improved health throughout the villages and unions addressed. This has further lead to economic empowerment due to less medical costs. The increased knowledge on rights has also helped to increase the political empowerment of the women as well as the men in targeted areas.

- *Providing a platform to discuss and share this knowledge with others and advocate and claim rights.*
  The platforms that were provided gave some women the opportunity to further empower themselves. In these platforms it were the women that already had a relative advantage over other women, that could take the opportunity to further empower themselves. Especially for their political and socio-cultural empowerment, these platforms have proven to be beneficial. But the time investments to be made for participating in these platforms has proven to be considerable, and is without compensation. This might explain why this cannot be done by every woman.

- *Providing mentoring and coaching on how to claim rights.*
  This has been an essential part of the enabling activities. Without guidance on how to claim rights, the women in the case studies could not have managed to do so. Just providing the knowledge and information on WASH budgets or health and sanitation is not enough as many women did not have any experience in claiming rights. By showing them the way, helping them in preparing speeches, by training them in speaking in public and by facilitating meetings, the women have been able to empower politically and claim their rights.

- *Providing tool-kit for birth attendants, Deep Tube Wells at a low cost, tools for repair and maintenance of DTW, files and register notebooks, and box for safeguarding the registers.*
  These facilitating provisions have been helpful, but in themselves have not contributed much to the empowerment of the women in this study. But for those in the process of empowerment they have been very helpful. …. So these measures are helpful in the empowerment process, but will not guarantee empowerment taking place.

- *Creating an enabling environment to claim rights, and assist in building linkages.*
  These activities have also proven to be important for the empowerment process of the women . By ensuring that the Union Parishad and standing committees were willing to engage with the members of the different platforms created, it was possible to claim rights. By showing the benefit to the stakeholders of listening to the women (and men) claiming their rights, they could achieve something. Without this willing attitude their demands would have fallen on deaf ears.
  Also the importance of linking the grass-roots level with Union and Upazila level should not be underestimated. This gave some women the opportunity to (further) develop their leadership skills and increase their political empowerment, and because of that their socio-cultural empowerment.

Keeping in mind that WASH-interventions and participation of women in WASH-committees should be considered a means to an end, we would like to recommend the following:

- The women that managed to empower themselves more than others, already had some point of advantage. It could be an idea to assess the level of empowerment of the women in leadership positions at the beginning of the project as well as at the end. Based on our findings these should include: level of education, support of husband and relatives to become active, social status within society (good family, profession), financial situation, degree of mobility, and talent and leadership skills. By targeting women that are in a slightly advanced position to take up the leadership in platforms created by projects, they will be able to empower themselves further and can manage to increase the respect for women and their capacities in general.

- It is important to look at all four elements of empowerment in any WASH-intervention, and to assess which element is the limiting factor and develop specific activities to strengthen that element. Tools can be developed for assessing the limiting factor and Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation can be used to monitor progress. Also capacity of staff should be built in analysing activities from a gender and empowerment perspective and in the use of these tools and PME.

- In all cases a project-approach was used, implying a limited amount of time and resources available to achieve results. … From the view of sustainability, … some good opportunities for further empowerment are lost. Therefore, for future projects it would be recommended to develop an exit strategy together with the local people, how to ensure the results obtained and continue without external support.

- At an individual level the women that have been able to empower themselves, should be encouraged to care for one or more successors. This could also serve as an indicator: number of successors mentored.

- Empowerment processes take time, which may not be possible to achieve in a sustained way in the project-period of only a few years, especially if empowerment is not the main objective. Possibilities to continue the empowerment process either by internal resource mobilisation or linking to external programmes and opportunities, should be looked for.

In order to assess if and how interventions have led to changes in empowerment of individual women and men, and of diverse social groups there is a need to develop and track indicators of empowerment over their duration, and even beyond. However, unlike some indicators of empowerment such as the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and Women Empowerment in Agriculture (WEIA), the empowerment concept outlined above is not intended to quantify the level of empowerment of, for example, women or poor farmers in a number which can then be compared nationally or even globally. It instead views empowerment as being subjective by nature and expressed differently for women and men and influenced by their caste, ethnicity, class, age, and ability. Therefore the methodology described here emphasizes the use of qualitative indicators over quantitative indicators of empowerment.

Groups targeted in the intervention can be involved in defining SMART indicators to measure change in the four elements of empowerment as outlined above. In this way a top-down formulation of indicators is avoided, which would have the risk of imposing indicators that do not make sense to the local groups involved. It also increases the opportunity for participatory monitoring of empowerment by the groups and individuals involved, which can even extend beyond the duration of the project. So project staff could facilitate focus group discussions with women and men on empowerment, in which they come up with indicators of physical, political, economic, and socio-cultural empowerment that they experience in the local context and which of these they would like to improve (see box below). The advantage of using indicators that come from bottom-up consultation is that it encourages ownership among the local people in monitoring the impact of interventions on their and others lives, as well as the change in their level of empowerment. This in itself is a process of awareness raising, leading to empowerment and sustainable development.

Example of Bottom-Up Formulation of Indicators

During a field visit to a village in Southwest coastal Bangladesh that was being covered by a large scale WASH programme, a Focus Group Discussion was facilitated with members of a Village WASH Committee (VWC) on how the local institution building component of the project had influenced the political empowerment of local women and men. They were asked if they could come up with some way of measuring this (an indicator). They mentioned that the number of women members in the VWC had increased, as at least 50 per cent of the members had to be women. The programme also tried to encourage political empowerment of women by stipulating that at least one of the executive positions of Chairperson, Secretary, or Treasurer should be occupied by a woman. However, the respondents said that often women members would send their husbands to attend instead of themselves. They believed that the number of times a woman sent her husband to participate in a meeting instead of herself could be seen as an indication of their lack of political empowerment i.e. the more times the husband attended showed less political empowerment of the woman. The members said they wanted to see more regular attendance of all their women members and more women in the executive positions carrying out their responsibility. This would show an increased political empowerment of women in their area, in their eyes.

When quantitative methods of data collection and monitoring, such as household surveys are used to collect baseline data of households and its members, it is very important that they do not regard households as a unit, and interview men and women in the household separately, as there are important differences in access to resources, finance, and decision making power between them. In the above methodology of empowerment, the quantitative data may give an indication of an element of empowerment but the qualitative data will reveal much more about it. For example, while surveys may reveal that a project has helped many women to engage in income-earning activities, inquiries may reveal that this has a varied influence on decision-making power and even mobility of women, depending on their age, religion, ethnic group, and class. In some cases it may even reveal that increased time spent in income-earning activities without any help in the household tasks, may be disempowering women physically, socially and politically.

To monitor changes in the four elements of empowerment of different women, men, and children, as well as changes in intra-household power relations as a result of an intervention, the initial set of quantitative and qualitative indicators can be used as the baseline against which changes can be compared after a fixed period of time, for example, a year. The quantitative information can reveal changes in income, assets, water and sanitation facilities, age of marriage of women, schooling levels of boys and girls, among other things. However the qualitative information will reveal if and how these changes have empowered women, girls, men, and boys from different socio-economic groups. For example can women and girls decide to delay marriage and study longer? Do they sell in markets, move freely in public areas, and experience less violence and harassment from men? Do they have adequate access to safe water and sanitation, and do the male members of their family help them in their household tasks? Are disabled men able to access social safety net programmes and the disability allowances due to them? Do they engage in social and economic activities, and are they members of social groups?

Socio-cultural empowerment: Feeling proud about one-self

While the four elements of empowerment are interrelated and mutually re-inforce each other, it is still good to arrange the indicators for them under the four elements[6] for a clear overview. For some qualitative indicators it may also be necessary to use a scale, so that respondents can indicate a change in level, so for example to the statement 'I receive more help in the household duties from my husband and/or son' a woman may indicate if she agrees, somewhat agrees, or disagrees with it, and say if this has changed since the last time of data collection.

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[6] In some cases an indicator could be grouped under more than one of the elements of empowerment. For example 'access to sell in markets' can be grouped under economic empowerment as well as physical empowerment. In such cases an improvement in one will mean an improvement in the other as well.

The box below shows a few examples of indicators of the different elements of empowerment that can be used to monitor change in empowerment of individuals and groups in a specific local context.

Some Examples of Indicators of the Different Elements of Empowerment

Economic empowerment:
- ❖ The number and size of loans taken out by an individual and or group of women/men to start a business enterprise, their rate of repayment
- ❖ Increase of income of individual members of the household
- ❖ Time saved by not having to walk long distances to get water
- ❖ Cut down in medical costs

Socio-cultural empowerment:
- ❖ Acceptance of members of the community of women travelling, riding motor cycles, or going out to markets
- ❖ Acceptance by the community that women /people from low caste groups/ people from ethnic groups take decision making positions
- ❖ Level of self-esteem of women /people from low caste groups/ people from ethnic groups How often a male member of the household helps the women in his family to fetch water and/or clean the toilet

Physical empowerment:
- ❖ The number of times groups of local men and/or women have been able to resist local practices of child-marriage, dowry, and/or violence against women
- ❖ Decrease in illnesses, assault and rape
- ❖ Availability of toilets for the disabled

Political empowerment:
- ❖ How often a woman candidate has been able to contest and win a seat as member of Union Parishad and/or Upazila Parishad
- ❖ Membership of water user groups and executive functions by women

It is important to realise that there are advantages as well as some shortcomings in the use of the empowerment concept as a method for analysis. To ensure you are aware of which those are, and to be able to use the methodology appropriately we will elaborate on these here.

The main advantages of using the empowerment concept in analysing development interventions is that it embeds the participation of the people that are being targeted by the project, and its emphasis on qualitative methods of data gathering and analysis, which also often entails the participation of the respondents.

This participation and consultation with the grassroots gives a more realistic idea of their needs and constraints, of local knowledge and resources, and of people who need help and who may be left out of the project benefits. Using this information in the initial stages of project planning can help to formulate a more effective, efficient, and equitable implementation and monitoring strategy involving local participation and resources. Moreover, engaging local women and men in participatory planning and monitoring empowers them, because of the skills they acquire in management, negotiation with stakeholders, advocacy, and local governance throughout the process. This helps in sustaining benefits after phase out of the project, and can ultimately lead to a major shift in the micro and macro-level power relations, and to a more sustainable form of development.

Apart from a better understanding of the requirements, wishes and needs of the local people, this methodology reveals a lot of hidden information that is often overlooked in monitoring surveys and impact assessments. Especially information on the differences within what was assumed to be a homogenous unit or target group, for example, 'low-income households' or 'small-holder farmers'. It reveals information on intra-

Political empowerment: speaking at meetings

household decision making, access and control of resources, assets and income and gender inequities herein. This information can in turn be used to analyze why certain project activities were successful while others were not, why some people and groups benefitted more than others, and what can be done differently for the project to be more effective next time round.

A shortcoming of using empowerment as a tool for development is that the responsibility of empowerment lies with the individual and/or group. This can lead to a situation where those who are already in an advantageous position to make use of the opportunities and tools provided by the project, are the ones who benefit first or most. These women and men may have the luxury of having spare time to be member of a WMG or VWC and attend its meetings, or they may be more highly educated to occupy positions of responsibility in these groups. So also they will profit first from information, skills, and assets being provided by the project. It may be that the poorest and most disadvantaged groups and individuals do not benefit from the empowerment objective of projects at all. However, they may still benefit in the long run from the multiplier effects created by empowered women, men, and groups for the larger community.

Tool for empowerment: Education

Due to the emphasis on qualitative methods of data gathering and on qualitative indicators, the micro-level information coming out of this empowerment analysis does not lend itself easily to being quantified in numbers. Moreover even if some indicators could be quantified, they would be very context specific, and could not be compared with similar indicators in another cultural, socio-economic, and political context. This aspect may be seen as a shortcoming to the advocates of quantifiable performance indicators. They argue that unless data is presented at a scale and in numbers that can be used by policy makers to monitor the progress of desired national and global goals, they are of little use and cannot be used to justify huge public spending in the development sector. However, trying to assigning a single number to social and gender inequities hides the complexities behind the numbers and often does not even fulfill the objective aimed for in the first place. The reliability of quantitative indicators has also come under increasing scrutiny, questioning the skills of those who are doing the counting, the purpose of the counting, and where and how the counting is done, as all of these can significantly alter data.

Conclusion

Empowerment as an objective for development, and methodology to analyse its impact on people's lives and capacities has strong potential to challenge the structures in society that block equitable and sustainable development and realize transformative and positive change for all. For this however, it is important for all involved stakeholders to understand and make explicit what their empowerment objectives are and how they intend to implement and monitor them. Without this there is the danger that empowerment becomes a 'buzzword', and that many projects end up paying lip-service to it. Consultation and participation of the end-users of interventions, and especially the most marginalized, is key for empowerment approaches to succeed, and should not be overshadowed by top-down facilitation and the pressure to reach quantifiable targets. Instead different levels (donors, governments, NGOs, CSOs, and local women and men) need to work together as equal partners that build on each other's strengths.