

# Empowerment

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## What is empowerment?

The word was first used in the 17th century and has meanings like 'authorize, delegate, or enable. It implies a transfer of power in a dynamic way over a period of time. Empowerment seems to come in 2 favors:

- One with benefits to both an empowerer and those empowered. I propose to call this type simply 'empowerment'.
- Another where power is created out of nothing by somebody who previously perceived themselves to be powerless and then woke up to their own power. This could be called 'self-empowerment'.
- All types of empowerment however involve 'self-empowerment' because the crucial step is a change in the state of mind of the person or people who are empowered. Assumptions that were holding people back are re-examined and revised.
- Empowerment implies an increase of consciousness. It implies more than a forced change of power in which there is a destruction of previous structures and values. The element of higher consciousness and consideration of both parties' needs and interests gained from a win: win solution provides the opportunity for progress to a richer way of life for everybody involved. Here is part of the link with psychological maps such as Spiral Dynamics. People become empowered when they move up the spiral to a higher level of self understanding.
- In the 20th century we saw many examples of political empowerment, led by people such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel, and Lech Walensa.
- "Empowerment forms an apogee (Highest point, apex) of many a system of self-realization or identity.
- At work employees say they do not have enough empowerment while managers claim that they give it. A definition of empowerment at work from an MBA thesis is "The process of sharing information, training and allowing employees to manage their jobs in order to obtain optimum results".

"Empowerment is a consequence of a style of management, and not an action (John Mortimer of the Vanguard Group says). This means that you cannot get empowerment by forcing it, but by creating the conditions for empowerment to flourish."

The best everyday definition of empowerment is very simple - "Helping people to help themselves" or "Leading people to learn to lead themselves". The notion of people having power to take action to control and enhance their own lives, and the processes of enabling them to do so.

## Use of the word empowerment

The term "empowerment" is used to refer to a number of processes, but all involve giving one or more parties to a conflict more power. This may be in relation to another party, or it may involve increasing the power (and hence efficacy) of all of the parties at the same time.

The most common use of the term "empowerment" refers to increasing the power of the low-power group, so that it more nearly equals the power of the high power group. From the perspective of intermediaries, this is often done because negotiation tends to be more successful when the parties negotiating have relatively equal levels of power. When they do not, the lower power party tends to get co-opted, or otherwise treated unfairly in the negotiation or mediation process. To prevent this from happening, the mediator can take a number of steps to "empower" the lower power group. The mediator can provide access to outside resources, give advice, give negotiation or communication skills training, or structure the process in a way that somewhat favors the low-power group, thus in a sense balancing out the power differences. Empowerment in this sense does not mean leveling the playing field as it does in the earlier sense, but rather increasing the ability of all parties to successfully deal with their situation on their own.

Empowerment can also refer to a larger, group-level, or societal level process, such as that which occurs with peace-building or the re-establishment of a civil society and traditional conflict management institutions. Many third party interveners have come to realize that the disputants themselves have very useful conflict-resolution skills, which have simply been discarded or forgotten in the height of the conflict. If they can be resurrected, or new approaches established, people can usually do a great deal to improve their own conflict situations. This, too, is a form of empowerment.

### **Key Concepts of Empowerment**

"Empowerment" means the restoration to individuals of a sense of their own value and strength and their own capacity to handle life's problems. Skill-based empowerment to the list, meaning that parties are empowered when they improve their own skills in conflict resolution, or learn how to listen, communicate, analyze issues, evaluate alternatives and make decisions more effectively than they could before. (Bush and Folger)

Empowerment means giving a person or group more power. This may be done by the party alone, through education, coalition building, community organizing, resource development, or advocacy assistance. It can also be done by a mediator, who can work with the lower power person or group to help them represent themselves more effectively.

### **Women's empowerment**

Women's empowerment is a process by which women gain access to resources and are able to develop their capacities with a view to actively participating in shaping their own lives as well as that of their communities in economic, social and political terms.

### **Principal Elements of the Women's Equality & Empowerment Framework Hierarchical**

Means arranged as a hierarchy - ranked one above the other, with the one above being more important than the one below. The five levels of the Women's Equality and Empowerment Framework are described as "hierarchical" because in some ways each "higher level is more important than the one below. For example, gender inequality in welfare is caused by gender inequality in access, which then raises the discussion to a more important and quite different level of discussion. These are five levels of analysis and not five stages of development process. Any development problem has these five

dimensions within it, and a project must address gender issues progressively at these levels if women's development is to make progress.

### **Welfare**

A term used in a very special way in the Women's Equality and Empowerment framework, to refer to the gender gap between women and men in their material well-being. Like the other levels of the Framework, it is an analytic category, so that the "higher" levels of empowerment are by definition excluded. If a project were confined entirely to this welfare level, this would mean that women would be passive recipients of project benefits, since they are not involved in the higher levels of empowerment which denote more active roles in the development process. Although lacking in any degree of empowerment, the welfare level is arguably the most important level, since narrowing the gender gap in welfare is the ultimate objective in women's development, to which the process of empowerment must lead.

### **Access**

The means or a right to obtain services, products or commodities is access. The Women's Equality and Empowerment Framework identifies "access" as one of the five levels of equality which are important in the process of women's development. Gender gaps in access to resources and services are one type of obstacle to women's development. Women's achievement of equality of access to resources and services as seen as an objective for women's equality, by the same token, women's mobilisation to achieve equality of access is an element of the process of empowerment.

### **Conscientisation**

Means the process of becoming aware of the extent to which problems arise not so much from an individual's inadequacies, but rather from the systematic discrimination against a social group which puts all members of the system as a whole at a disadvantage. In women's development, conscientisation therefore involves the process by which women collectively analyze and understand the gender discrimination which they are up against. This is the basis for action to overcome and dismantle the obstacles which have been holding them back. In the Women's Equality & Empowerment Framework, women's and men's conscientisation is seen as the crucial step in the process of empowerment. It is crucial to the process of development in general. Through conscientisation, both men and women come to understand the nature of the obstacles they face, and the need therefore to mobilise for collective action. The process of discussion and understanding of common problems is a critical phase, for it enables and motivates men and women to move from being mere beneficiaries to being actors and active participants in their own development. Conscientisation involves the identification of disparities and the analysis of their underlying causes.

### **Participation**

In the general sense means having a share, or taking part. The Women's Equality & Empowerment Framework uses this word to denote having a share and taking part in decision-making. We are therefore here defining the term "participation" in this active sense of having a say in how things are done, and in how resources are allocated. Merely to have a share in resources is not in itself participation in the sense that it is used to denote an empowerment level in the Framework. The Framework sees gender equality in decision making as one of the essential aspects of women's empowerment, and uses the word "participation" to denote this aspect of empowerment.

## **Control**

Control is the ability to direct, or to influence events so that one's own interests are protected. The Women's Equality & Empowerment Framework recognises women's equality of control with men as the most important or "highest" aspect of women's development - where women ensure that resources and benefits are distributed so that both women and men get equal shares. Whereas conscientisation and participation are essential to the process of women's empowerment, it is only gender equality in control which provides the outcome.

## **Community empowerment**

Community empowerment involves individuals acting collectively to gain greater influence and control over the determinants of health and the quality of life in their community, and is an important goal in community action for health.

## **What is an Empowerment literacy program?**

### **Definition**

An Empowerment literacy program is one which focuses directly or indirectly on reducing social, economic, or political inequities between two groups through literacy. There is a common sentiment that "knowledge is power." Literacy is a form of knowledge. Also, literacy gives one access to even greater reservoirs of knowledge. In contact situations between literate and non-literate groups, those who are literate almost invariably have an advantage over those who are not. In situations where illiteracy has been institutionalized as a means of social control or discrimination, literacy is a powerful and effective liberator. It is a means of empowerment. In a sense, all literacy programs have an element of empowerment. Indicating conditions

Here are some conditions that indicate the choice of an Empowerment literacy program:

- An educated elite or middle class is taking advantage of a disadvantaged target group of semi literates or preliterate.
- A sector of a community such as women, certain clan groups, or those who live in a certain area, has limited opportunity (access to work, access to education, access to political voice, and vote) because of intentionally limited access to literacy or education.
- A given group or community is socially or politically dominated on the basis of language and access to education.
- Illiteracy is blocking efforts to improve health and welfare of the masses.
- Illiteracy is limiting the value of any efforts toward political change.

### **Program goals**

Here are some typical program goals of an Empowerment literacy program:

- To provide literacy as a vehicle of self defense and empowerment

- To enable new literates to survive and successfully cope with current realities
- To organize new literates to confront and solve their problems (such as health, education, environment, and economic needs)
- To make available to disadvantaged people the tools and information needed to solve major problems. Decision making is an empowering process.

### **Some recommended strategies for an Empowerment literacy program:**

- Use practical and functional approaches to materials and classes.
- Emphasize and teach reflection and problem solving.
- Encourage and provide assistance in local institution building.
- Encourage collaboration and networking with other agencies, especially official agencies.
- Help the target community to identify their needs and aspirations.
- In program management, emphasize local decision making and management.

### **Empowerment Approach (as a WID approach)**

The empowerment approach is a recent one, articulated by Third World women. Its purpose is to empower women through greater self-reliance. Women's subordination is seen not only as the problem of men but of neo-colonial oppression. This means women's collective mobilisation to overcome particular instances of institutionalised gender discrimination. For example, for women to advance it is not sufficient only to seek more education; by the same token, they need to mobilise to end discrimination against girls in the school system. The empowerment approach recognises the triple role of women, seeks to meet strategic gender needs indirectly, through bottom-up mobilisation and fulfillment of practical gender needs. It is potentially challenging, although it avoids association with Western feminism. It is popular with Third World women's NGOs and increasingly popular with international NGOs and donor Organisations as well.

### **Empowerment**

Empowerment is a process of redefinition and redistribution of power. The focus on the empowerment of women aims at increasing their active role and their decision-making power in all spheres of society. Women should receive equal access to and control over material as well as non-material resources and be able to make decisions on their own behalf. It is important that power in this respect is defined as power to do something and not as power over others.

### **Empowerment for health**

In health promotion, empowerment is a process through which people gain greater control over decisions and actions affecting their health.

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