



I. What's it all about?

Explanation of expressions and associations

Empowerment strategies are used for power-building purposes in the contexts of exclusion, marginalisation, discrimination and violence. The long-term aim of empowerment processes is a society in which exclusion, marginalisation, discrimination and violence no longer exist – in fact, it all boils down to dismantling existing structures that are based on violence and domination. For this reason, empowerment strategies start with an analysis of power relationships (context analysis) and then try to intervene wherever exclusion and violence occur.

Empowerment

- The expression „empowerment“ is based on the concept of power. When speaking of empowerment we understand power as „the power within“, i.e. the power to act and take decisions of one's own accord. Power thus means the actual possibility for an individual or a group of people to act independently. Power should not be interpreted as domination over others. It follows that empowerment cannot have a vertical hierarchical structure.
- Individual/collective empowerment aims to strengthen individual men and women, groups, organisations and civil society. This means curbing the violence with which individuals and groups are often confronted. Socio-structural empowerment aims to restrain structural violence (e.g. in political, legal or economic systems) and promote fair structures and living circumstances. Individual/collective and socio-structural empowerment depend on each other – they are, in fact, inseparable.
- According to the context and the existing power structures, empowerment projects address the needs of different groups of people, e.g. landless families, women working under precarious conditions, victims of violence or men and women who are excluded from decision-making processes and have no access to resources such as education, health care or income.

Empowerment is not a universal concept and it needs to take place according to the individual context. Empowerment projects can be realised in such areas as violence prevention, access to resources, conscientisation and networking. We will be working with these examples in this issue of „Focus“.

Empowerment, gender and peace promotion

Conflict environments are generally marked by violence, a lack or unfair distribution of resources and a general climate of insecurity. Such circumstances hinder both individual/collective and socio-structural empowerment. The results are discrimination and exclusion (disempowering context). Logically, the starting point for any empowerment project – as with most International Cooperation (IC) projects – is the conflict environment concerned, which needs to be analysed from the gender perspective.

Empowerment acts against exclusion and violence of all kinds. Empowerment processes thus play an important role in violence prevention, conflict resolution and peace promotion. Lasting peace and justice with freedom from violence cannot be achieved as long as individual persons and/or groups are excluded and marginalised.

According to our context analysis – which also covers power relationships between the sexes – both men and women need to participate in the empowerment process, albeit in different

Editorial

Dear Readers,

In this edition of „Focus“ we will take a closer look at gender-sensitive empowerment and how it can be applied to resolve conflicts.

Empowerment is a much-used expression that is employed in different contexts. We understand empowerment as a power-building process that aims to release people from relationships that are based on violence and dominance – including relationships between men and women – and widen their scope of action. Empowerment strategies must therefore be applied at both personal/collective and socio-structural levels. Since empowerment processes act against all forms of exclusion and violence, they play an important role in violence prevention, conflict resolution and peace promotion. Using specific examples, we have examined women's projects working in the areas of conscientisation, violence prevention, access to resources, and networking. The report highlights the strengths and limitations of each type of project and our findings can be consulted when planning future programs and projects, as well as for implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

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ways.

In addition to the marginalisation suffered by both men and women (e.g. based on economic, legal or cultural

discrimination), women are often subjected to marginalisation and discrimination because of their gender. This is why the empowerment of

women is particularly important in peace promotion.

Link to: Bridge-Report No. 40: Gender and Empowerment: <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/Reports/re40c.pdf>

II. Where are the problems?

Lessons learnt

Since empowerment processes modify power structures and aim to achieve long-term social and structural changes, they may have unforeseen consequences. Careful supervision and the participation of all those involved are thus essential.

Women's empowerment and peace promotion

The factors of physical and psychological violence, insufficient personal and collective security, and the denial of access to resources are interwoven to form a barrier that hinders people – chiefly women – from participating in the social, political and commercial life of their community. In such circumstances, support and empowerment for women are consciously used to create the best possible conditions for the equal participation of men and women in violence prevention and peace promotion. Women's empowerment is a collective power-building strategy that enables women to develop, make known and realise their own concepts and ideas of peace, security, justice and good living conditions. Women should not merely „participate“, but have a direct influence on peace and security policies or peace promotion and violence prevention measures. They should decide, too, which issues are important and when, where and with

whom discussions should be held, how much money should be spent, etc. In this way, they will gain definitional power.

Using a conflict environment to bring about changes

Empowerment processes intervene in unjust power relationships, such as between the sexes, and try to change them. This can cause tension and conflicts, for example, between men and women. It is thus important to be aware of potential conflicts from the outset and to include them in the planning, implementation and monitoring of empowerment projects. Existing and newly-arising conflicts between men and women must be resolved without violence, with the ultimate goal of an evolution of the power relationship between the sexes in the direction of equal rights. Such conflicts often act as a catalyst: for example, it becomes necessary to increase the conflict competence of women, or to include the men, family and community/society in the empowerment process and sensitisation efforts.

Inclusion of men in women's empowerment processes

Empowerment projects are always based on an analysis of existing power structures, which include the relationship between the sexes. It is important to include all the players in

specific power relationships and to consider gender images and roles. In patriarchal societies, domestic violence is often seen as a normal way of dealing with conflicts and stress. While many women accept such violence – often because they have no other alternative – others try to escape (e.g. by joining armed bands in the hope that they will not be exposed to sexual violence in such circles).

During armed conflicts, gender roles also undergo a change: this must be considered and used for empowerment processes. Often women are not allowed to participate in public life and their scope of action is limited (e.g. through stricter controls); at the same time their responsibilities and workload increase (e.g. feeding their families). In times of war the male image becomes militarised (the man as a soldier), while the breadwinner role becomes obsolete, due to the widespread unemployment. Often, men react to such developments with violence against their wives and children. In view of such gender-specific changes women and men need separate empowerment strategies.

One of the most important aspects of empowerment is conscientisation, as well as the critical examination of behaviour that is deemed normal. The modification of established gender roles, e.g. when women become gainfully employed, can help people to experience other roles for men and women, which will finally become

Link: Women Waging Peace: Preparing for Peace: The Critical Role of Women in Colombia. Conference Report, May 9-14, 2004: <http://www.womenwagingpeace.net/content/articles/ColombiaConferenceReport.pdf>

accepted and even encouraged. Men need to be included in the social process of evolution towards equal rights. Men and women (including people in certain occupations, such as police, social workers or politicians) must be sensitised to the different situations and role models of men and women, as well as the injustice between the sexes. For

women's empowerment to succeed, men need to understand that such processes will not disadvantage them and that the idea is not to invert the balance of power, but to abolish domination, oppression, exploitation, discrimination and injustice. When women acquire skills or learning, or become politically engaged, this can

benefit the whole of society, including men. On the other hand, the empowerment of an individual (woman) may indeed change the personal scope of action (of a man) insofar as his power in the sense of „power over others“ will diminish.

III. What are the prospects?

Examples of empowerment projects

In this chapter we will look at several examples of women's empowerment projects. These projects work at different levels, are networked with each other and attempt to achieve individual/collective and socio-structural empowerment. For each of the four project types we have evaluated what they achieve (strengths) and what they fail to achieve (limitations). In practice, however, the project types cannot be distinguished from each other so clearly, because most projects contain elements of several different types. The following models should enable IC workers to assess the strengths and limitations of the individual project types and to plan and implement their own programs or projects accordingly.

Conscientisation projects

Violence exists in all areas of society. During armed conflicts not only women and girls, but also men and boys are increasingly subjected to different forms of violence. Depending on the patriarchal structures and gender roles in society, violence within the family is quite often seen as „normal“, while sexual violence towards men, as in wartime, is a taboo subject. When the conflict has ended, gender roles that have started to change often revert to their former status. Such conditions call for education and conscientisation programs that will bring about positive changes (e.g. better access to resources and rights).

> For example: Kayan, a feminist organisation in Israel, works with Palestinian women (teenage school-



„superempowermentman“

girls, mothers of schoolchildren or child-minders) in their villages by forming so-called „empowerment groups“. The program is carried out in three stages. The first step is conscientisation and a critical look at established customs and gender roles (e.g. women's readily accepted responsibility for bringing up children). During this phase the women develop personal awareness. At the second stage, which goes

somewhat further, the women organise themselves into groups. They then analyse the problems and needs in their village, work out possible solutions and try to gain access to the corresponding decision-making structures. They can count on the encouragement and support of Kayan. For example, one group of women organised a transport system for local villages, while another group achieved improvements in the

system of paying child-minders. The third step is institutionalisation, e.g. by founding a local women's organisation, whereby Kayan will

supply the necessary know-how. Not all women who have taken the first step will proceed to take the second and third steps. The women must

decide for themselves if and how they want to continue. (cfd)

Conscientisation projects

Strengths

- Overcoming isolation (of women)
- Opening up new scope of action
- Strengthening self-confidence (e.g. increasing the ability to protect oneself against psychological violence)
- Creation and encouragement of changed and increased awareness, which is seen as a big personal step forward (by the women concerned)
- Access to knowledge and paving the way for participation in definitional power

Limitations

- No direct assistance to earn an income and no direct influence on the material situation
- Thematic limitation is difficult and there is a danger of getting bogged down, so that the objective is lost from sight
- Success/impact is difficult to gauge, which is why such projects are often not taken seriously by so-called donor organisations
- Complex methodology and teaching methods, which call for highly trained staff
- Often individualised strategies; failure to apply the knowledge gained in collective actions against existing structures

Projects against domestic violence

Violence is a phenomenon encountered in culture, politics, commerce and personal relationships before, during and after armed conflicts. Flexible strategies are therefore required in order to curb violence.

Domestic violence needs to be combated at several different levels, i.e. by means of care for the immediate victims of violence and their families, education and conscientisation campaigns, lobbying, information-gathering and networking. It is only through combined violence prevention at different levels and involving all participants – men and women alike – that violence can be overcome.

> For example: the Women's Empower-

ment Project (WEP) is part of the Gaza Community Health Program. It supports women who are victims of domestic violence. WEP works at different levels: at the care level the project offers psychological and legal advice. The women can attend vocational courses and thus develop new skills and gain access to sources of income. Since this program enjoys a high level of acceptance, it represents an entry point where these women can make contact. Thereafter, it becomes possible to discuss sensitive issues with them like the taboo subjects of domestic violence, sexual and psychological aggression and sexual health. On the conscientisation and educational plane WEP holds workshops in

schools (for schoolchildren, teachers and parents) on gender-related topics, including violence against women. Here, men and women learn to recognise gender-related needs and to solve problems (e.g. by understanding that a longer period of education for girls is preferable to early marriage and can reduce the incidence of violence in families). At the lobbying level WEP is campaigning for the criminalisation of domestic violence: this should be officially declared a criminal offence. For this purpose the project is networking with women's organisations in the Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank and Egypt who are confronted with similar problems. (cfd)

Projects against domestic violence

Strengths

- Refuge and protection for women and children who are the victims of violence
- Women receive information concerning their rights and support in enforcing those rights
- Conscientisation/awareness; breaking through the taboo of domestic violence
- Sexual health and family planning are discussed, with a positive impact on the definitional power of the women concerned
- Partial involvement in the women's family and social environment

Limitations

- Only very limited assistance to earn an income and attain economic independence (of the women)
- High psychological stress levels / overtaxing of staff; danger of burnout (often due to lack of supervision or professional support)
- High demands (education) placed on staff
- Risk of the organisation turning into a social service that uses up more and more financial resources and neglects the structural level and lobbying (lack of sustainability)
- Some degree of resistance from those who cannot be influenced directly (e.g. police)
- In a general climate of lawlessness the rights-based approach is undermined by weak state institutions, making legal protection difficult
- Sometimes restrictions on involvement in the women's family and social environment

Resource-oriented projects

Many relationships are marked by violence and sexual discrimination. Financial independence from husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles and mothers-in-law is thus one of the most important elements of security for women and it is a precondition for empowerment.

> For example: Solidarité Féminine (SolFem) in Morocco supports empowerment processes for single mothers who have been ostracised by society and live under precarious conditions. Here, the women learn to plan their own future. For this purpose SolFem has created some income-generating projects: the

women are trained and can then work in SolFem's restaurants and kiosks, in the bakery or at the newly opened Hammam (steam bath). These projects enable the women to achieve financial independence, which in turn gives them a certain measure of security. (cfid)

Resource-oriented projects

Strengths

- Contribution to the economic independence of the women and their families
- Direct aid in the fight against poverty
- Strengthening of self-confidence
- Increased respect and improved status for women in their families and communities
- Increased knowledge and know-how

Limitations (continued)

- Differing views of staff and participants as to the areas of conflict to be addressed: economic resources as entry points vs. satisfying immediate economic/material needs

Limitations

- Income-generating measures are often not very successful due to:
 - a) lack of commercial know-how
 - b) too few economic resources (buying power) available in the environment of the organisation or in the population
 - c) difficulty in maintaining the balance between sensitisation, counselling/supervision and economic/commercial competences
- There is a risk that the sensitisation/awareness/education components will be neglected (due to poor organisation, lack of interest or work overload/overtaxing of staff)
- The structural levels (violence, discrimination, relationships between the sexes, macro-economy) are neglected

Networking projects

Empowerment projects need to combat exclusion mechanisms, violence and lack of access to resources at different levels. Often, however, a single project cannot act on all levels at the same time. For this reason it is important for IC organisations to support a number of projects that complement each other and together cover all the different levels. Organisations working at different levels should network with each other and coordinate their empowerment efforts in the various areas concerned (e.g. violence prevention in cooperation with men or women or with institutions). Joint lobbying is also important – either by several organisations or else together with so-called donor organisations.

> For example: the Ligue Démocra-

tique des Droits de la Femme (LDDF) promotes women's rights in Morocco. The organisation has many branches in Morocco, which enables it to handle the whole spectrum of women's rights, thereby reaching not only the micro (base) level of society, but also the macro level. Local branches of LDDF offer an educational program (alphabetisation, civil rights, etc.), as well as instruction, legal counselling and, if necessary, legal representation for women in court. Information is gathered (e.g. concerning the violation of women's rights) and documentation is prepared. This groundwork then becomes a basis for lobbying at a political level and for nation-wide campaigns, during

which LDDF promotes the enforcement of women's rights and equal rights for men and women, at the same time supporting the activities of civil society and NGOs. For example, the organisation has been running conscientisation campaigns for years and lobbying for the reform of the Moroccan family laws, which discriminate against women. The organisation has become a point of contact between the base of the population and those in power, networking with NGOs, government committees, citizens' organisations, experts and the media. It has argued for changes and proposed suitable measures, thus paving the way for legal reforms that will give men and women equal rights. (cfd)

Networking projects

Strengths

- Opportunity to use the experience gained from the base of the population for campaigns
- Better impact for lobbying and political influence (agenda setting), and thus also influence on structurally determined exclusion mechanisms
- An aid to gathering information about gender-specific discrimination and violence
- Dialogue on international topics (e.g. human rights, UNO Resolution 1325, CEDAW) in a local context: concepts are broken down for local application
- Possibility of monitoring implementation of initiated processes

Limitations

- Financing difficulties
- Networking can be hindered by competition amongst NGOs (e.g. because of money or political orientation)
- Risk of losing contact with the base of the population
- Risk of becoming dependent on international agenda setting
- Impact is difficult to gauge or can only be assessed in the long term

As already mentioned, the strengths and limitations of the different project types listed in the boxes are to be understood as models only. In practice, most projects contain aspects of several different types, with the emphasis on one or other of them.

Many NGOs that support and en-

courage empowerment processes are confronted with the fact that the necessary reflective work is labelled a „luxury“ and thus goes unremunerated. Without sufficient resources, these NGOs are bound to lack capacity and professionalism.

For the planning, implementation,

monitoring and evaluation of gender-sensitive empowerment projects in the context of armed conflicts the questions raised in the last issue of „Focus“ might be helpful:

Link to „Focus“ 2/04 on Gender- and conflict-sensitive program management: http://www.cfd-ch.org/newsletter_gender.html #Anchor-30137

- Literature**
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Links **Empowerment**

- Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC): Are We Contributing to Empowerment in Latin America? Bern 2003: http://www.deza.admin.ch/ressources/deza_product_en_852.pdf
Español: ¿Contribuimos al empoderamiento en América Latina? Bern 2003: http://www.deza.admin.ch/ressources/deza_product_es_852.pdf
- Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC): „Gender Toolkit“:
<http://www.deza.admin.ch/index.php?navID=2920&userhash=9772209&IID=1> (English)
<http://www.deza.admin.ch/index.php?navID=2920&userhash=9772209&IID=3> (Español)
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- Report-in-Brief: Human Rights, Advocacy, and the Empowerment of Women: An Education and Action Project in the Yugoslav Successor States (B.a.B.e.). 1999: <http://www.cedpa.org/publications/PROWID/EENIS/babe.pdf>

Organisations

- B.a.B.e. (Be active. Be emancipated)
<http://www.babe.hr/eng>
- cfed – The NGO for Women’s Empowerment
<http://www.cfed-ch.org>
- DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era)
<http://www.dawn.org.fj> (English)
<http://www.dawn.org.fj/spanish/Spanishpage.html> (Español)
- GTRC (Gender Training and Research Center)
<http://www.gtrcenter.org>
- International Alert
<http://www.international-alert.org>
- Kayan – A Feminist Organization
<http://www.ittijah.org/member/kayan.html>
- Siyanda mainstreaming gender equality (BRIDGE)
<http://www.siyanda.org>
- WEP (Women’s Empowerment Project)
<http://www.gcmhp.net/women.htm>