Women Empowerment - A Symbolic Perspective

A Case Study of Dhoke Khabba, Rawalpindi

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Formal Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis titled 'Women Empowerment – A Symbolic Perspective A Case study of Dhoke Khabba, Rawalpindi' is the result of my individual research. Any ideas taken directly or indirectly from third party sources are appropriately indicated as such.

I also declare that this work has not been published or submitted to any other university/degree in a similar form.

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Laraib Qureshi

Islamabad, July 2018

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents: my father, who gave me the confidence to pursue a field of my interest and provided me with the tools and favorable circumstances of my own empowerment, and my mother, whose love and unwavering faith in my abilities encouraged me and gave me unconditional support throughout; making me the woman I am today.

Abstract

Women empowerment has been a prominent part of the rhetoric of development in developing countries. Though there is a multitude of literature available on women empowerment in Pakistani context, the multi-faceted nature of the term has led to quantitative studies; either capturing it through indicators or simply using the complexity of its definition in mentioning it as a buzzword. This thesis is a qualitative study, which attempts to fill the gap left behind by generalized, largely quantitative literature. Its focus was on conceptualization of women empowerment from the perspective of development agencies as well as the indigenous group that is being empowered, by taking the interaction between them as symbolic, where empowerment may have different meanings for stakeholders. The research took women of Dhoke Khabba as the indigenous group and Aawaz (Voice and Accountability Programme) as the project which aimed to bring about empowerment of women in the locale. It provided a symbolic perspective by discovering the perceptions attached and observing achievement of empowerment through interactions on the project platform. Evolved grounded theory approach with a symbolic interactionist theme was used to analyze and organize the findings and data was collected through qualitative techniques such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation. The main findings of the study indicate that when being opertionalized, empowerment cannot be taken as a monolithic, homogenous term; rather, it has multiplicity of meanings, significantly two distinct dominant understandings: that of indigenous women and Aawaz respectively.[1] Specifically, it is perceived at three different levels: upper, middle and lower or local. The project is carried out in accordance to the goal, outputs and related meanings associated with empowerment at the upper level. However, this is different from how empowerment is perceived at local level by beneficiaries who identify with the concept according to their practical lived realities, outlining hindrances to its achievement. At the middle level, during interactions on the project platform, these perceptions clash, where local women participate but utilize the resources available to adopt alternative pathways to empowerment, not taken as legitimate exercise of power by upper level. The findings were showcased in a model as a symbolic representation of women empowerment. The research emphasizes on the recognition of non-linear nature of empowerment when attempting to bring it about in Pakistan, adopting participatory approaches and taking into account contextual inhibiting factors while treating the women as active stakeholders rather than passive participants.

[1] For clarity of understanding, during discussion and analysis in Chapter 6 and onwards, 'empowerment' (in single quotation marks) is specifically referring to empowerment as per Aawaz's perception and definition of the word.

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List of Abbreviations

AF	Aurat Foundation
AAC	Aawaz Agahi Centres
ADF	Aawaz District Forum
AVF	Aawaz Village Forum
AWF	Ahsas Welfare Foundation
AUF	Aawaz UC Forum
ATF	Aawaz Tehsil Forum
DAI	Development Alternatives Inc.
EWS	Early Warning System
ERM	Early Response Mechanism
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GIDP	Gender in Development Policy
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SAP-PK	South Asia Partnership Pakistan
SC	School Councils
SDF	Sungi Development Foundation
SMC	School Management Committee
SPO	Strengthening Participatory Organization
UC	Union Council
UN	United Nations

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WID	Women in Development

1. INTRODUCTION

"Human being is an organism that interacts with others and with self; a dynamic being; a being that defines immediate situations according to the perspectives developed and altered in on-going social interactions." - (Charon, 2011, p. 41)

1.1 Setting the Research Context

Empowerment of women has increasingly become a part of gender and development debate over the past ten years. From Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD) to the empowerment approach, different theories and approaches emerged to challenge the top-down nature of the development model, with the focus on women and their needs. (Buckley, 2000) There are numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Pakistan working to do just that – women being the sole focus of their interventions.

Not only are there women empowerment centered projects existing in Pakistan, there is extensive literature on women empowerment available as well. From economic to social to political, every sphere of women empowerment has been taken up by organizations and funding agencies; basing their projects on indicators and then stating the rate of success respectively. However, in all the project reports and literature on empowerment, it is often used uncritically and without context. If there is an attempt to define it, the statements are listed on the first few pages and then not referred to or correlated with the findings. As Rowland puts it, the word is used in a way which presupposes that the reader or listener will know what is meant and the question of how empowerment comes about can either be assumed or ignored (Rowlands, 1997, p. 7).

What then arises as a significant gap in the studies and practices revolving around empowering women in Pakistan is how empowerment is conceptualized by the stakeholders in the process; leading the development experts to believe they can bring

about empowerment, and women to perceive themselves as either needing empowerment or having been empowered through the interactions with the development agency.

Participation and empowerment emerged as alternative approaches in contrast to top down approaches, in an attempt to respect people's need to identify their own priorities with regard to their issues. (Buckley, 2000) These alternate approaches also infiltrated the development discourse in Pakistan and all organizations aiming to have sustainable projects which strengthen local capacities adopted them readily.

While studying development studies in my undergraduate degree, I acquired vast knowledge about development. The assertion that it should not be 'one size fits all' rather, custom designed for every country appeared to be reasonably appropriate in ensuring sustainability and empowerment. Sadly, findings on a field visit - during an internship in a non-governmental organization - to a local support organization based in *Kotli Sattian* Punjab, bore a disappointing contrast. An internationally funded bio gas plant project aiming at economic empowerment, with 100 completed plants, sounded promising. However, a visit to one of the plants shed light on the reality of perceived success; it was covered with vegetation - indicating lack of use. Upon being probed, one of the local females indicated access to transport as their preferred means of economic empowerment.

I failed to witness customized solutions to development problems, which would strengthen human agency, creating an enabling environment. Instead, people's choices and capabilities were restricted by projects based on top-down approaches, being promoted under the umbrella of empowerment. This experience was not only a revelation about the gap that exists between the development experts and the local community but also served as a motivation to play my part in contributing to fill this gap practically or theoretically.

The afore mentioned project was not gender oriented but I could not forget that 5-minute conversation with a woman in *Kotli Sattian* - whom I had never met before. This lead to an interest in women empowerment; specifically, whether women empowerment in Pakistan was a reality and how it was being operationalized.

The interaction between the organization aiming to bring about empowerment and the local community during the course of the project is pivotal in the construction of empowerment.

From the names of the project to the way it is communicated through the activities to how it is perceived by both parties, the interaction is highly symbolic. For each person involved, empowerment contains certain connotations, conceptualizations and perceptions. As Charon summarizes 'emergent human' view of Charles. K Warriner in his book *Symbolic Interactionism – An Introduction, An Interpretation, An Integration:* "What we (humans) do in a particular situation depends on our definition of that particular situation and makes it important to recognize that we must be understood as primarily social, symbolic and mental rather than as simply physical." (p. 41).

Thus, taking empowerment as a symbolic process - defined and operationalized in social interaction - this research seeks to identify the conceptualization of empowerment as perceived by NGOs and indigenous people of the selected locale with reference to women, when carrying out projects that not only aim to bring it about but sustain it.

1.2 Statement of Problem

There is no doubt about that fact that there is extensive literature available on women empowerment in Pakistan. Review of present literature gives a multi-faceted picture of empowerment, both of what it entails as a concept and what should be the dimensions and frameworks within which it is measured. However, it is only useful if one has to create a record of the different contradictory ways empowerment can be defined, measured, its endless dimensions and the relationship between power and empowerment.

It is often discussed conceptually rather than in relation to specific projects (Rai, 2007; Batliwala, 1994; Oxaal & Baden, 1997) and when it is, there is a tendency to repeat a few well established themes, relate the results to pre defined indicators and proclaim that empowerment has taken place, with a few hindrances along the way. (Saigol, 2011; Moser, 1998; Kabeer et al., 2011; Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001) If not that, then the researches are purely quantitative; the whole process of empowerment being brought down to statistics. (Haq et al., 2016; Khan & Awan, 2011; Asif, 2013) It is highly disturbing to note that in Pakistani literature on women empowerment, even where it has been implemented by the NGOs, there is absence of local perspectives – the perspectives of the empowered women themselves.

There are numerous development organizations in Pakistan aiming to empower indigenous people. However, there is a need to discover the conceptualization of women empowerment from the perspective of development agencies as well as the indigenous group that is being empowered. Taking this interaction between both groups as symbolic, one can proclaim that the perceptions of both groups with regard to development might be different, or have a tendency to evolve due to interpretations, rather than assuming that it is a one-size-fits-all process with no challenges to the pre conceived or developing notions.

This research seeks to put forth a symbolic perspective on empowerment, taking *Dhoke Khabba* in Rawalpindi as the locale under study; where the local women have been and are beneficiaries of a women empowerment project – Aawaz – being carried out by two NGOs respectively: Aurat Foundation and at grass roots level, its sister organization - Ahsas Welfare Foundation. The study aims to explore the background and initial perceptions of empowerment in local women and assumptions of NGOs and how - in the interaction between the NGO workers and locals - empowerment as a concept is symbolically communicated and achieved, aiming to determine the connotations attached to empowerment of women when operationalized as a project goal in this particular locale.

1.3 Research questions

Keeping the aim of the study in mind, I have operationalized my research problem into two questions:

- How is women empowerment symbolically perceived and conceptualized by the stakeholders in the development project aiming to bring it about?
- How is women empowerment achieved in a development project while being operationalized via interactions?

1.4 Research objectives

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- To identify the understandings and objectives associated with the women empowerment project

- To explore what perceptions are attached to empowerment by the local beneficiaries, shaping their interaction with the project team
- To observe the respective activities and discussions of the project aiming to bring empowerment
- To develop a model of empowerment derived from symbolic interaction within the context of a development project, drawing from the concepts and categories established from the data analysis

1.5 Significance of the study

Empowerment is a multidimensional concept which is dynamic, having no concrete definition. However, that does not diminish the importance that the term entails presently – with its elevated status in the mainstream discourse of development. It is considered a panacea to the issues of equity and bringing about change; a necessary part of the development interventions that cater to women's needs in Pakistan. Keeping this in mind, there is a dire need to change the rubric of women empowerment in Pakistan and convert its abstract pre-conceived notions of the process into operational, realistic ones.

This study aims to play its part in achieving that goal and has a threefold significance in this regard. First, it has a theoretical utility in its ability to fulfill the gap in literature that exists with regard to women empowerment projects in Pakistan. Rather than assuming what empowerment signifies, the study aims to being forward the perspectives of the most important stakeholders in the process – the beneficiaries themselves.

Second, it is not only important to bring the perspectives of the locals into the fold, it is just as important to look into the conceptualization of empowerment by the development agency who has the authority on the how, why and where of the process. It is crucial to determine whether both parties are on the same page. The symbolic perspective of the study is significant in this regard because it looks at empowerment not only as a symbolic concept but as process entailing symbolic interaction which takes the perceptions of all the individuals and the connotations attached to the process, in their own right. The model put forth as result of the data analysis acts as an aid in this regard.

Last but not the least, this research provides a new lens to the operationalization of women empowerment within development studies by providing an anthropological context. Its qualitative, in-depth nature not only allow authentic data for the monitoring and evaluation of the project under study, but is also of value in planning and organizing further development interventions on women empowerment, inspiring local perspectives to be brought forth in needs assesment studies and ensuring sustainability of these interventions.

1.6 Definitions of the key terms

Some key concepts or terms used in the study are defined as follows:

Development

Generally, development means an 'event constituting a new stage in a changing situation or the process of change.' In terms of a socio-economic system, development is taken to mean improvement and may occur due to deliberate effort by agents or an authority. Development in one part may also give rise to conflicts. It has many dimensions, like economic, human or sustainable development. (Bellu, 2011) The word is used as a vision, a historical process and as action – deliberate effort to bring about change. (Thomas, 2000)

Development can also be seen as expansion of freedoms that individuals enjoy, where growth of GNP or incomes, education, health care, political and civil rights, industrialization and social modernization is seen as the means to achieve that. It also requires removal of sources of unfreedom which include poverty, tyranny, poor economic opportunities etc. (Sen, 1999, pp. 3-4)

It is widely accepted that development is taken to mean different things at different times by different people. What first started as a dominantly economic discourse in an attempt to solve the problems of the 'under developed areas' of the world (Escobar, 1995) is now adopted by individuals and organizations alike to bring about positive change. This is done by identifying policies, programmes and projects both on local and international scale. (Chambers, 2004)

Development is understood as something that is only brought about by either government action or development agencies achieving it through development projects. (Ferguson,

1994) This study will use the concept of development in terms of the development projects that aim to bring it about through empowering the target population who, in this instance, are women.

Symbol

The word symbol comes from the Greek *symballein*, which means 'throw together.' In simple terms, it is defined as a sign which points towards or stands for something else due to attachment of meaning in a contexualized and interpretive practice. (Fornas, 2012) Moreover, symbols and their meanings do not exist in isolation rather, they are complex, with multiple meanings. (Grupp & Schmitt, 1979)

For Geertz (1966), a symbol means any object, quality, act, event or relation that is able to serve as a conceptual vehicle for the symbol's meaning. They code information amd are culturally transmittable, serving as models for and of reality. Turner (1973) saw a symbol as having the following attributes; containing multiple meanings, unification of these meanings, condensation of many meanings simultaneously and polzarization of meanings at either normative or sensory poles. While Ortner (1973) concluded thay anything, by definition, can be a symbol – it being a vehicle for cultural meaning. The current study similarly takes the word symbol as a vehicle for meaning, defined in interaction via communication.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism is a perspective that was developed in the middle of the twentieth century and was derived from the work of George Herbert Mead and coined by Herbert Blumer. It emphasized on the premise that symbols emerge, are sustained and modified through social interactions, stressing upon the 'actor's perspective' whose experiential based view is the reality of the symbolic world as he/she sees it. (Grupp & Schmitt, 1979)

In this instance, the act perfomed by the individual is not just how it is observed by others but rather, also entails an internal process of impulse, perception, manipulation and consummation. It becomes a 'symbolic interaction' because in order for people to take part

in a social interaction, they have to first assign meanings and interpret them respectively. (Hewitt, 2002)

Humans are thought to be in control of the ongoing definition of their situation and organization of their action towards their own goals. (Charon, 2011) This study takes the process of empowering women as a symbolic interaction between the agencies and the women keeping the theory of symbolic interactionism as central to the research design.

Perception

Perception is understood to be understanding or awareness. It is the process through which individuals reach an understanding of their surroundings by selection, organization and interpretation of sensory input. (Pomerantz, 2003) This study explores the perceptions of the women in the selected locale with regard to their empowerment and how these relate to the perceptions of the development agencies.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is defined as the "systematic social structures that institutionalize male physical, social and economic power over women. It is used to explain the systematic subordination of women" (Reeves & Baden, 2000). It is an ideological and social construct which considers men as being superior to women. It is also defined as a structural system of power relations in which women are dominated, expressed and exploited by men. (Walby, 1990) It was necessary to explain this concept because it is widely used when talking about thee context of empowerment of women, especially in a developing country like Pakistan.

Power

Simply, power is the ability to influence and control, manifesting itself in different forms. It is dynamic and is exercised in the political, social and economic relations between individuals. The term has been elaborated upon in detail in Chapter 2, as it is the core concept of empowerment itself.

Women Empowerment

Generally put, this is a 'bottoms up' process to transform gender power relations through awareness and capacity building done by individuals or groups. The term empowerment is

now used by a wide majority of development agencies and programmes and especially in relation to women. The complexity of the term manifests itself in being used interachangeably with agency (freedom to choose), control (over decision making), access (to resources) and above all, having power. In the context of development projects, women empowerment is defined in terms of specific activities and end results. (Reeves & Baden, 2000) The term is further extensively discussed and defined in Chapter 2.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter elaborates on some of the literature that has had an influence on the research topic – women empowerment - over the years. It starts from the development studies perspective on gender and development where the term empowerment originated, then goes on to elaborate the concept of power (it being the core concept of empowerment). The section then sheds light on the concept of empowerment itself, as approached by distinguished experts, authors and organizations over the years as evidence of its symbolic nature and finally, offers literature on women empowerment in the Pakistani context, highlighting the need for my own research perspective - a symbolic approach to women empowerment.

2.1 Gender and development

Debates within development theory have involved emergence of numerous theories related to women and development. While some think of them as interaction between feminism and development, others take them as frameworks that approach women and development from different perspectives overtime. The debate on women empowerment started in 1950s when, with the advent of the modernization theory, realization dawned that the development planning doesn't cater to the needs of women as beneficiaries of the process. As a result, the WID approach surfaced.

2.1.1 Women in Development (WID)

Chronologically coming after the welfare approach, this school came into being through the influential work of Danish economist Esther Boserup who wrote *Woman's Role in Economic Development*. It focused on sexual division of labor in agrarian economies and towns and the movement of population from village to town and from agrarian to non-agrarian activities. It included the equity approach, the anti-poverty approach and the efficiency approach. (Tasli, 2007)

By focusing on projects of income generation for women, the main aim of 'Women in Development' (WID) was to integrate women into economic development, regarding

women as an underutilized asset with its focus on low-income women and providing women access to the market so that they can enjoy the economic benefits. However, Rowlands (1997) stated that the approach looked at women as instruments and failed to look at the strategic causes of women subordination in social structures, instead focusing just on their role in production. Hence, the approach was highly economy centric, focusing more on economic growth's negative impact on women and how to bring them into the folds of benefits from this growth.

2.1.2 Gender and Development

In contrast to WID, 'Gender and development' – which originated in 1970s – focused on gender and gender relations; analyzing how these power relations are reshaped by development (Momsen, 2004, p. 13). Since it shed light on power relations, it recognized the presence of multiple power relationships in the lives of women. With its roots in social feminism it looked at the issue in terms of social relations in gender. Women were seen as agents of change rather than passive recipients and their subordination was highlighted through gender mainstreaming. However, gender mainstreaming and inclusion of women in all spheres of life is a difficult task and the approach has been criticized for this. (Tasli, 2007)

2.1.3 Women and Development

According to Peet & Hartwick (2009), 'Women and Development' put its focus on the international class structures of inequalities. Keeping this in mind, this approach shed light on the need to bring forth the view of developing countries because the development model lacked this perspective. The effects of colonialism were brought into the debate about equality. Global capitalism, dependency and patriarchy were the main factors that were seen to be instrumental in subordinating women. However, it was criticized as it failed to offer a genuine alternative to the development model.

2.1.4 The Empowerment Approach

Associated with bottom up or actor oriented studies, the empowerment approach infiltrated the development discourse in 1980s and by mid 1990s, mainstream development agencies had begun to adopt the term. It emerged not only from debate within theory but as a result of practical experiences of Third World women working at grassroots level, marking its origins in the feminist and third world organizations like DAWN[2], who brought it into inception as a feminist vision of development. However, while it was linked to the participatory approaches in development, the meaning of empowerment was never clearly defined (Rowlands, 1997). The approach focuses on its root-concept power in terms of capacity of women to realize their internal strength rather than control over others. (Moser, 1993, p.74 as cited in Tasli, 2007, p. 31)

As the concept of empowerment gained support as part of the gender equality discourse, it was also being associated with participatory approaches in the 1980s, promoted by Robert Chambers who advocated a people-centered approach. Empowerment was seen as giving agency to the people and saw participation as a necessity to achieve it (Chambers, 1984). He saw top-down approaches to development as disempowerment and introduced participatory development methods like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as the facilitators of empowerment.

Following the introduction of the empowerment approach in development literature, there was a shift in the terminology used in studies when referring to the inequalities between men and women. Empowerment was considered a more relevant term than 'status' or 'autonomy' because of its connotation as a dynamic term rather than a static one (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006). Not only this, the term was thereafter used by organizations to advocate certain interventions and policies. An example is of UNDP's Gender in Development Policy (GIDP) which was developed to promote women empowerment and their advancement via gender mainstreaming (Oxaal & Baden, 1997). Empowerment was both

[2] Development Alternatives for Women in New Era (DAWN) is a network of policymakers, researchers and activists working in the Southern region and coming up with new ideas about women empowerment, linking micro level grassroots activities and putting forth problems of Third World women. (e.g. by Oxaal and Baden, 1997)

used as a goal to be achieved, as an objective and as a synonym to 'advancement of women' thus vividly using the language of empowerment.

Empowerment ultimately became a key word in the rubric of gender equality, promoted by key humanitarian organizations over the world. As briefly summarized by Malik & Courtney (2009), it was taken up as a priority by the United Nations (UN) and thereafter was the main theme of the international discourse promoted by Beijing Declaration, Platform for Action by United Nations and the United Nations' Millennium Declaration which formed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of which, promotion of gender equality and women empowerment is one of the eight. (p. 30)

It is evident that empowerment emerged as part of an alternative development agenda and was promoted to achieve equality in target groups, especially women and gender equality, which lead to the term women empowerment becoming a part of the wider discourse. Organizations, researchers and authors referred to the term in many different contexts and provided their own understanding of it (elaborated in the third section of this chapter) but first, it is critical to look at the concept of power to fully understand the notion of empowerment.

2.2 Power

Being the core concept of empowerment, power holds weightage in the definitions of empowerment in present literature. Also, power relations are a major component of the circumstances surrounding empowerment and to understand it, there is a need to examine this vital underlying concept.

The word power comes from the latin word *potere* which means 'to be able'. But this definition simplifies the complexity and significance of the concept because it has the potential to reshape and create the social order as well as the individuals in it. (Siddiqui, 2005)

Power was first introduced by Karl Marx with the concept of 'power over' where the elite classes exercised their power over the oppressed lower class. However, it evolved with the contribution of post- structuralist authors who viewed power as being manifested in the

contexts and domains which would never be considered as housing power. For them, power is knowledge which is everywhere; an individual creates his or her identity on its basis, acts upon it and caters to it as the truth that is easily available in the norms, values and traditions (Brown, 2006). Therefore, power was seen as not being used by people as a property or weilded as an instrument or a quality. Rather, as being distributed by words, images and the surroundings, which gives power itself a symbolic value.

As a post-structuralist, Michel Foucault played a vital role in this re-definition of power. In his model of power, he saw power not as a possession, rather as an entity that is circulated and exercised. He also termed resistance as inevitable when it comes to exercise of power (Foucault, 1980). This is significant in looking at power as a core concept of women empowerment because their day-to-day struggles are evidence of this resistance to power relations.

Foucault's work has also been the subject of debate between feminist scholars. The 'three waves' of his concept of power were interpreted as follows: first: surveillance and biopower, in which the emphasis on body was taken as a tool to analyse women subjugation, second: where there is power, there is resistance, so domination and victamization were taken as granted, and third: sexual identity and regimes of truth i.e. construction of gendered minority identities. But above all, the feminist writings emphasize the need to give importance to the subject's own interpretation of experiences when trying to understand power. (Deveaux, 1994)

Thereafter, power was then seen as not only over another but the idea of having it and using it for positivity was introduced. In this regard, the notion that there are many different forms of power, and its ability to take them has been stated explicitly by (Rowlands, 1997, p. 13; Williams et al, 1994):

Power over: Involving domination or subordination and generally a controlling power (zero sum) and in a gender analysis, dominantly used by men over other men and men over women. In this case, empowerment of women would imply less power for men.

Power to: Generative or productive power, creating possibilities that may include the ability to solve problems and have decision making authority therefore can be percieved as creative and enabling. This may include the acvhievable boundaries of a person.

Power with: Gives the perception of a group solving problems together, this is exercised commonly with others and gives rise to collective empowerment to achieve collective goals so it is reffered to as collective action.

Power from within: Individual's mental and spiritual strength is the focus, with self awareness and self confidence leading to change and acceptance of others as equals.

Rahman (2013) discussed Rowlands' view on the different forms of power and relates them with empowerment: 'power over' signifying need for active participation in decision making process in the face of oppression while 'power to' and 'power with' concerning people's awareness of their interests and influencing others.

However, the author doesn't elaborate on 'power within' which is given utmost importance by Naila Kabeer, who stated that in order for empowerment strategies for women to work, women needed to acquire the 'power from within' which is self generated. Therefore, it is necessary to deconstruct power in order to understand empowerment. (Kabeer, 1994)

The concept of empowerment in terms of power has also been used by Friedman (1992) when proposing the theory of alternative development. He stated that there are three types of power: social, psychological and political. While the latter two denote self confidence and self esteem and collective action respectively, social power is knowledge which is actually empowerment and can be transformed into the other two types of power. (p. 32-34). This conception of power is the same as believed by a vast majority.

Before proposing her own model on women's empowerment, Mosedale (2004) stated that power is situational. The specific situation that people are in defines how much or how little power they have in that given moment of time. Each person has their own space of freedom, which according to the situation, changes shape (p. 251). This perspective on power is the most applicable when applying the concept of power to empowerment in ground reality.

While talking about empowerment and power, Rai (2007) declared that empowerment has such different meanings and consequences because of the fliudity of the word power. It serves as an action verb, is transformatory, signifies gaining control, showcases struggles for inclusion and thought of as manipulating the agendas and throught processes of others.

The aforementioned literature on power doesn't fully delve into the issues of power but gives an idea about what it entails with relevance to the current research topic. The complexity that comes with the territory when discussing power is the same issue faced when it comes to the literature on empowerment or when specified, women empowerment. Whether empowerment is taken as a gender issue or a development issue, the fact remains that it has the same multidimensional nature as that of its core concept. The next section tries to do justice to the fluidity of the research topic as it has been defined, approached, measured and evaluated in the existing literature.

2.3 Symbolic nature of empowerment

There is extensive, exhausting literature available on empowerment – from possible definitions to theories to frameworks, everyone who has used the word has contextualized it and given it meaning within that context i.e. it has many different connotations. Keeping this in view, empowerment can be regarded as symbolic. Majority of the literary work reviewed revolved around the research topic i.e. empowerment of women, therefore, the authors used the word empowerment interchangeably with women empowerment which is also relevant in the context of this research.

2.3.1 Defined as a concept

Batliwala conceptualized empowerment as a consciousness which constantly evolves, identifying target areas, strategies, doing analyis of outcomes and trying to bring change. (Batliwala, 1994, p. 132)

While Martha Chen identified empowerment to be made up of resources, perceptions, relationships and power i.e its main components. (Chen, 1992, as cited by Manuh, 2006, p. 9)

For Vanessa Griffen, empowerment means control, having a say, decision making power with influnce and recognition and respect as an equal citizen. She expressed her view through a gendered (feminist) lens and claimed the definiton to be viewed from a woman's perspective (Griffen, 1989). In the same way, Rappaport saw empowerment to be control over the cognition, personality and motivation and claimed that everyone has the inert potential for it. (Rappaport, 1985, p. 17 as cited by Gutierrez, 1990)

The World Bank defined empowerment as the "expansion of assets and capabilities of the poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" (World Bank, 2002, p. 11 as cited by Manuh, 2006, p. 13)

Shahida Bibi, when doing her research on women empowerment recognized that it is not necessarily limited to women. She cited the following definition: Empowerment is the creation of political power collectively (macro) and to increase power at personal level without structural change (micro) (Pernell, 1985, as cited in Bibi, 2012, p. 21). She then gave her own perspective saying simply that empowerment is having the confidence and capability in solving one's own problem.

Drawing from Jordan (1997), Walsh, Bartunek & Lacey proposed a relational approach to empowerment which is taken from women's relationship experience. An individual's sense of purpose and understanding is seen to be connected with their ability to have meaningful connections with others. Its focus is on a person's own initiative in making these 'connections' which are seen to be the building blocks of communication and purpose, allowing the person to feel empowered (Walsh, Bartunek, & Lacey, 1998, pp. 2-8). Thus they see creation of healthy relationships as empowerment.

Muhammad Siddiqui, when looking at representation in Pakistan through the lens of women empowerment, defined empowerment as giving legality or approval of legitmate power to a group or to an individual. He went on to define women empowerment not only as domination via use of power but acquiring of equal rights and control over their lives respectively. (Siddiqui, 2005, p. 36)

Samina Malik and Cathy Courtney quoted a definition of the concept by United Nations Population Information Network (POPIN) where women empowerment was seen to have five components: right to choice, right to power over their own lives, influence over social change at a broader level, sense of self worth and right to access resources and opportunities. (Malik & Courtney, 2011, p. 30)

CARE, international non-governmental organization offered a multi dimensional definition of empowerment, encompassing individuals, structures and relationships and that a change in all three spheres is a necessity to eradicate disempowerment of women. (Saigol, 2011, p. 2)

The same author included a defintion by World Economic Forum which entailed findamental human rights and empowerment as being inclusive of access and equity. Acess based defintion of women empowerment also made way in Pakistan's Medium Term Development Framework 2005-2010 which highlighted information, education, resources, decision making power and authority. (Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan 2005 as cited in Saigol, 2011, p. 2)

In addition to these, Zoe Oxaal and Sally Baden summarize how empowerment is defined by other major contributors to the discourse: it is about participation (Human Development Report, 1995) about challenging oppression and inequality (Oxfam) about liberation from oppression, allowing one to reach full potential (feminist activists) and so on. (Oxaal & Baden, 1997)

While most shed a positive light on empowerment, there is literature that labels it a disabling concept. They state that it is a part of the Western discourse, given a meaning that serves the global drive of Western capitalism. Where the NGO sector tries to enable empowerment, it is disabling because then it divers the attention of the opressed away from the fact that it is the responsibility of the state to provide them with the resources and the opportunities to make choices. The concept itself imples that an external agency has given power to the ones who needed it i.e. empowering them in a formal rather than substantive manner. Power is symbolically entrusted to a section of people without confining it to specific, concrete spheres. (Mohanty, 1995)

Naila Kabeer used the term 'disempowered' to explain empowerment by saying that people who exercise choices in life may be powerful but not necessarily empowered because they have never been disempowered. If they were previously denied the ability to make strategic life choices, only then can it be called empowerment. (Kabeer, 2005)

Naturally, one feels overwhelmed after reading such varied definitions of empowerment. There is no doubt that it is a contested concept which has complex, inter related elements which makes it a value-laden term with no common definitions. However, it is evident that whether seen as a consciousness[3] or having control[4] or consisting of several components[5] or in relation to power and disempowerment[6] or acquiring of rights and access[7] or about potential, participation or challenging inequality[8] or as a relationship[9], it is safe to state that empowerment was defined differently by different people according to their perception of it when they felt it necessary to label it as a concept.

2.3.2 As a process

Similar to it being defined as a concept, many scholars have put forth the premise that empowerment should be seen as a process rather than a conceptual goal to be achieved.

Page & Czuba (1999) saw empowerment as social, multidimensional and a process. According to them, it occurs within various dimensions and at different levels. It is similar to a path or journey and occurs in relation to others. As a process, it fosters power – it depends on the requirement that power can change or expand.

Gutierrez (1990) said that empowerment can be seen in terms of a process that leads to enhancement of personal, inter personal or political power. In a similar theme, Rosalind Boyd (1989) defined it as a process which allows individuals to acquire material and political power by access to resources. And then in the context of gender and patriarchy,

[3] Batliwala (1994)
[4] Griffen (1989),World Bank (2002) and Rappaport (1985)
[5] Chen (1992) and United Nation's POPIN
[6] Pernell (1985), Kabeer (2005) and Mohanty (1995)
[7] Siddiqui (2005), United Nation's POPIN and Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan (2005)
[8] Oxaal & Baden (1997)
[9] Walsh et.al (1997)

Moghadam (2007) stated, when talking about the shift from patriarchy to empowerment, that it is not a one time event for women, rather, it is a process which contests traditional power relations.

Srilatha Batliwala has referred to it as a process in several literary works. She said that empowerment can be seen as a process that shifts power in three ways; by challenging ideologies, by changing existing patterns of control and access to resources and by transforming institutions. This conceptualization was put forth in a document entitled 'Women's Empowerment in South Asia: Concepts and Practices' constructed from perception and practice of actual women. It emphasized on ideological changes which were seen to be critical to sustaining empowerment. (Batliwala, Taking the Power out of Empowerment: An Experiential Account, 2007)

In another instance, she defined empowerment as the process as well as the outcome of the process with which women challenge the societal gender-based discrimination fostered by patriarchal ideology in instutions and structures by controlling material and intellectual resources (Batliwala, 1995). Here, she focused on the outcome of the process rather than treating it as a manifestation of power like in the perspectives above.

On a similar note, a very popular and well-cited definition of empowerment is that which was given by Naila Kabeer where she refered to it as the ''process whereby those who have been declined the ability to make strategic life choices acquire this ability'' (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437 as cited by Mosedale, 2005, p. 249) This is another perceived outcome of this 'process'.

Likewise, Bonnie Keller and Dorcas Mbewe describe it as a process due to which women are then able to control resources, assert their rights, be self reliant and organized thus defeating their own subordination (Keller & Mbewe, 1991). This outcome would foster capacity building and awareness in the women.

In other literary works, like that of Dandikar (1986), empowerment is declared a multi faceted process with four facets: economic resource, political arena, family structure and the woman's ideological sense. In these type of approaches to it as a process, the authors merely state what constitutes or propels it.

For Jo Rowlands, empowerment is bringing people who are at the margins of decision making process into the middle where they are able to maximize the opportunities available to them without any hindrance. It can be seen a bottom-up process through which there is awareness among people of their own interests in order to participate in decision making (Rowlands, 1997). In nature of looking at it as a bottom-up process, the definitions that term it as 'a social process that lets people gain control over their own lives' and 'the process via which currently disadvantaged achieve equality in rights, power and resources' also look at it from a participatory, grass roots perspective. (Page & Czuba, 1999 and Mayoux, 2008, as cited by Jupp & Ali, 2010)

Mehra (1997) perceived empowerment as a changing process in which women play a vital role as catalysts. This viewpoint is shared by Sarah Mosedale, who explicitly defined women empowerment as a process in which women redefine the possibilities extended to them in restricted situations, in comparison to men, thus redefining gender roles of being and doing. (Mosedale, 2005, p. 252) In these definitions, women are seen to be active participants of the process, rather, indispensable to the process of empowerment.

In other words, when perceived as a process, empowerment is seen to foster power either as an attempt to acquire it, enhance it, or contest it[10] or as the outcome in the shape of access, capacity building, having a choice, assertion of rights and so on[11] or as having multi faceted constituents[12] or a bottom-up approach that enables participatory development[13] or when it comes to empowerment of women specifically, placing them as the change agents[14] who should be willing to participate in the process itself. I find this perception of empowerment as a realistic one because being defined as a process gives empowerment the aura of a journey with uncertainity rather than a definitive, labelled mile stone. It should be noted however, that in this instance too, each scholar attached meanings to it as a process as they identified to it.

[10] Page & Czuba (1999), Gutierrez (1990), Boyd (1989), Moghadam (2007) and Batliwala (2007)
[11] Batliwala (1995), Kabeer (1999) and Keller & Mbewe (1991)
[12] Dandikar (1986)
[13] Rowlands (1997), Page & Czuba (1999) and Mayoux (2008)
[14] Mehra (1997) and Mosedale (2005)

2.3.3 As a multi-dimensional approach

Many contributors to the literature on women empowerment have also dealt with its fluid and multidimensional nature by treating it as an approach, rather than a conceptual goal. In this respect, they have broken it down into spheres and dimensions. It should be kept in mind that the overlapping nature of the phrasing used by authors makes it difficult to separate the actual components but I have tried to review them here with clarity.

According to Nelly Stromquist, as cited by Mosedale, empowerment is a socio political concept with four components or dimensions: First, cognitive, which is how women understand their own subordination and related knowledge. Second, economic, which refers to work and consequently independence. Third, political, the ability to asses situation and mobilize. Fourth, psychological, which is women's own belief in their ability to act and is related to confidence. (Stromquist, 1995, p. 15 as cited by Mosedale, 2005, p. 248)

Siddiqui (2005) stated that women empowerment has three dimensions: political, economic and social. He elaborated that within the political sphere, women need to have a say in political decision making. And in order to be politically empowered, women have to be empowered on an economic and social level, only then will there be a strike on the gender hierarchy. (Siddiqui, 2005, p. 38) CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) broke down empowerment into four dimensions for analysis: the three mentioned above and legal (Oxaal & Baden, 1997). Extending these further, Anju Malhotra shed light on the most frequently used dimensions of women empowerment: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political and psychological. She drew on the frameworks developed in the past to look at these on household, community and a broad level for their operationalization (Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender, 2002, p. 13). Oxaal and Baden (1997) when listing approaches to empowerment, mentioned sexual and reproductive rights i.e. health as a different dimension.

Therefore, empowerment is seen to have various different broad dimensions within which it operates: cognitive[15], economic[16], political[17], social or socio-cultural[18], inter-personal[19], legal[20], psychological[21] and health related[22]. These can also be looked at as the spheres within which empowerment is operationalized and understood. They give the concept its 'multi-dimensional' nature.

2.3.4 As a framework

Being perceived as a framework also contributes to its multi-dimensional nature as every framework created automatically divides the concept into subsequent dimensions, levels or concepts which then attempt to define or measure empowerment. However, I am reviewing these frameworks in a different sub-section for ease of understanding and more importantly, because of them being termed frameworks to understanding empowerment.

A very prominent framework developed by **Naila Kabeer** has been cited, used and elaborated upon in literature time and again. When explaining empowerment in terms of disempowerment, she stated that power entails the ability to make choices and empowerment entails change and these are the pathways through which empowerment occurs:

1. *Resources***:** These allow the individual to make choices i.e. exercise agency and they can be material, human or social.
2. *Agency***:** People's ability to make and act on their choices as well as their goals and motivations which comes from within.
3. *Achievements:* The outcomes of making the choices due to agency.

She saw these dimensions as being related to each other in the context of resources being a pre-condition to agency (the process) leading to the achievements or what she called

[15] Stromquist (1995)
[16] Stromquist (1995), Siddiqui (2005), Malhotra et.al (2002), CIDA and Oxaal & Baden (1997)
[17] Stromquist (1995), Siddiqui (2005), Malhotra et.al (2002), CIDA and Oxaal & Baden (1997)
[18] Siddiqui (2005), CIDA and Malhotra et.al (2002)
[19] Malhotra et.al (2002)
[20] Malhotra et.al (2002) and CIDA
[21] Stromquist (1995)
[22] Oxaal & Baden (1997)

outcomes. Kabeer focused on the transformative power of the agency when elaborating on empowerment's multidimensions. She added autonomy and decision making power to the element of access to resources and defined power as the ability to make choices. (Kabeer, 1999)

To complement this framework for women empowerment, **Sunita Kishor** developed a three-way conceptual framework as well: sources, evidence and setting. She was of the view that adding the women's locale, sources of empowerment and the related evidence to the mix would allow a wholesome picture of whether empowerment was taking place or not on both broad and specific levels. (Kishor, 2000)

Another framework for women empowerment, given by United Nations Development Fund for Women (**UNIFEM**) included the following principles: leadership for gender equality, human rights, health and safety, education and training, empowering marketing practices and equality. (UNIFEM, 2010 as cited by Saigol, 2011)

Caroline Moser (1993) provided a conceptual rationale for the achievement of equality, equity and empowerment, basing her framework on the following dimensions:

1. Women's triple role: reproductive, productive and community work
2. Practical and strategic gender needs
3. Gender planning, policies and their implementation

Jo Rowlands also put forth a framework resulting from her research in Honduras, where she saw empowerment as not merely participation in decision making; it must also include the *processes that lead people to percieve themselves as able and entitled to make decisions* (Rowlands, 1997) . With regard to gender and development, she stated that empowerment is most usefully defined as dymanic, changing process rather than an end product. She outlined three dimensions to illustrate how empowerment is experienced. These are:

1. **Personal:** developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalized opression
2. **Relational:** developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it

3. **Collective:** individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact than each could have done, involving collective action based on cooperation.

(Rowlands, 1997, p. 15)

With the personal empowerment opening the 'key' to the 'door' of empowerment, these processes then build upon each other and positively incur changes within the other due to their close link. In addition, there may also be inhibiting or encouraging factors that reflect positively or negatively on the changes brought about.

Sarah Mosedale also suggested a conceptual framework for assessing empowerment with particular emphasis on power relations. For her, an empowerment framework should be inclusive of:

1. Constraints to action i.e. power relations that exist (power over, power within, power with)
2. Identifying how women's agency has developed
3. Identifying how women's agency changed constraints to action

She identified a possible (and specific) set of questions for each dimension of identification and stated that the answers that emerge as a result of this will be examples of empowerment and what it entails. (Mosedale, 2005)

Last, but not least, **Sara Longwes** created the women's empowerment framework which was then utilized by UNICEF to mainstream gender, with emphasis on equality (Oxaal & Baden, 1997). She identified 5 levels of analysis:

1. Welfare - women's material needs
2. Access - in terms of resources
3. Awareness raising - conscientization and recognition of problems
4. Participation - equal decision making
5. Control - balance of power

In summarizing these frameworks, it is evident that the creators of these frameworks have treated the multi-dimensional nature of empowerment on a more context-specific and

narrow range of conceptualization, to make it easier to monitor and understand as opposed to the broader spheres identified previously. It is also important to note that as a framework, empowerment as a concept is easier to apply to situations with its meaning made less complex with a divided analysis.

2.3.5 As an outcome to be measured

In spite of women empowerment being a highly fluid term, without a consensus on its exact definition, it has been increasingly used in quantitative studies to assess the quality of development and well-being. These studies employed indicators of empowerment to measure whether it was taking place or not and justified this by stating that since it doesn't have a concrete definition, it needs to be measured. I have listed these indicators below in order to understand empowerment as a symbol.

Education is used as an indicator to measure empowerment in a majority of the studies as it gives the women confidence to avail opportunities, have better communication, reduced restrictions on mobility and better control over resources (Moser, 1998, as cited by Gupta & Yesudian, 2006; Noreen & Khalid, 2012). Access to relevant opportunites and 'participation in education' is key to increasing empowerment because it increases gender parity, and gives them the skills to get economic independence (Malik & Courtney, 2011, p. 31). 'Educational index of a women's household' is taken as an indicator when looking at empowerment from an Islamic viewpoint because education is a right in Islam. (Chaudhry, Nosheen, & Lodhi, 2012)

Economic indicators like 'economic participation and opportunity' (Lopez-Carlos & Zahidi, 2005) are also abundantly used when conducting researches on empowerment. 'Workforce participation' leads to a woman feeling more empowered because she feels like she contributes to the family earnings with cash from a regular job (Sen, 1990, as cited by Gupta & Yesudian, 2006). 'Paid work' (Chaudhry et al., 2012) 'control over income' (Kabeer et al., 2011) 'ability to earn a living' (Hashemi et al., 1993 as cited by Rahman, 2013) lead to more liklihood of a woman making her own decisions and exercising agency. Therefore 'access to economic opportunities' such as cash, expand choices and help bring about empowerment. (Mehra, 1997)

Social norms and practices are also taken as indicators such as ‘mobility’ (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001; Gupta & Yesudian, 2006; Bibi, 2012; Kabeer et al., 2011; Hashemi et al., 1993) which is also a pre requisite to get education, access resources and have employment in the public sphere therefore increasing agency. ‘Gender based violence’,‘marital age’ (Fargues, 2005, as cited by Chaudhry et al., 2012) are also among the indices selected within this area, as hindrances to empowerment.

‘Participation’, in terms of public life at the community level on political and social level (Kabeer et al., 2011; Hashemi et al., 1993) and at household level in the domestic ‘decision making’ with regard to finances and resource allocation (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001; Bibi, 2010; Hashemi et al., 1993) is also taken as indicators of empowerment respectively.

At an individual level, ‘sense of self’ and women’s own ‘perception’ about themselves have also been introduced as indices by the same studies. Other than this, exposure to media, access to health and access to resources have also been introduced as an attempt to measure empowerment.

When it comes to empowerment as part of development, it is also necessary to mention the human development paradigm of which empowerment is a component, along with productivity, equity and sustainability. The paradigm introduced the index called the gender empowerment measure (GEM) which looked at women’s participation, representation and income as a composite indicator. (Human Development Report (1995) as cited in Oxaal & Baden, 1997, p. 20)

The indicators used to measure empowerment are so diversified and have been used in so many studies in such a plethora of ways that it is not possible to review all of them. However, Malhotra et al., (2002) have simplified this diversification to an extent and stated that the most frequently used indicators are decision making, mobility and access to resources, with economic contribution, participation, health, sense of self-worth etc. as less frequently used. (p. 26)

The empirical and highly quantitative studies, with their bi-variant and multi-variant analyses provide statistics for what is thought to be a qualitative concept. It is not that easy, however. These proxies of income, education, health or mobility may be able to be

measured but empowerment itself cannot. When perceived as an outcome to be measured, empowerment is made even more complex with variables, indices, indicators and dimensions which are, yet again, defined at the author or scholar's preference.

2.3.6 As a participatory evaluation

It has been stated numerous times in many literary works that empowerment can be regarded a context specific phenomenon. The essence of this conceptualization of empowerment is that what might be empowering in one context might not be perceived as empowering in another, even if it is defined in the same manner, with the same components. There are many literary works, which then see women empowerment as a participatory evaluation where it cannot be defined as a stand-alone concept, especially when it is being used development agencies on 'how to empower' in projects.

Mosedale (2005) plainly stated, when talking about problems faced by agencies facilitating empowerment, that a woman's level of empowerment will vary substantially because of influence from other criteria, such as her age, family position or class. Further, drawing from the research work done by Nassbaum (2000)[23] and Mohanty (1991)[24], she declared that analysis of a woman's position should be in the basis of their lives' realities rather than treating them as objects. (pp. 244-246) Therefore, when sketching the picture of empowerment, the realties of these women should be shaded in.

When putting forth the perspectives of African American women with relation to empowerment, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) emphasized the role of identity and knowledge when bringing about conscious change via empowerment. She also shed light on the structural divisions on the basis of class, race and gender. According to her, lived experience should be taken as a criterion of meaning as every women is an agent of knowledge and if she changes her ideas and actions then the shape of power relations itself changes. (pp. 257-275) Here, the author gives more importance to the women as knowledge banks when looking at women's empowerment.

[23] 'Women and human development: the capabilities approach' by Martha Nassbaum
[24] 'Under Western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses' by Chandra Mohanty

When studying women's empowerment with relation to paid work in Bangladeshi context, Kabeer, Mahmud & Tasneem (2011) discovered that it is not a single process; there are many pathways to women's empowerment. Their analysis brought attention to three forms of overlapping operating resources: material, cognitive and relational where the material resource (employment) operates via relational and cognitive pathways and does not take place in the same fashion for every woman. (p. 38) This again signifies that empowerment is not a uniform or linear concept – the 'pathways' are subject to the woman experiencing them.

In a similar context, in terms of looking at it as a process that intends to empower as part of a development project, a study conducted by Suzanne Hanchett (1997) when evaluating the Bangladesh Flood Action Plan defined four phases:

1. Pressure for change in the research agenda
2. Gathering information about women
3. Getting information from women
4. Consultation with women

Mayoux (2002) also opined that the best way to make empowerment sustainable is to consult the women and ensure there is negotation between the women and development agencies in order to discover all the needs and constraints rather than mere imposition of models. (p. 32)

Gutierrez (1990) offered techniques on how to empower clients in an intervention. Acceptance of their definition of the problem, identification and building on existing strengths, conducting a situational power analysis and mobilization of resources were advised by her in the context of women empowerment. In this instance, she saw it as enhancement of personal, inter-personal and political power. (pp. 151-152)

Last, but not the least, Jupp & Ali (2010) in their book, *Measuring Empowerment? Ask them – Quantifying Qualitative Outcomes*, adopted an evaluation approach to empowerment which Robert Chambers called a methodological breakthrough. It was a two-step evaluation process at the community level and the results-based management level of the social movement in rural Bangladesh. They perceived it as the outcome of

participatory evaluation and developed indicators based on the statements of the local people. This shows that even measurement of empowerment – which is deemed a quantitative approach to a qualitative concept – needs to be done from the eyes of those being empowered.

Therefore, like Mosedale (2005) correctly stated, empowerment means different things to different people. However, with regard to women's empowerment, she considered four aspects to be generally accepted: disempowerment is the pre-requisite for empowerment, it cannot be gifted by a third party - one has to want it, definitions usually include decision making on important matters at individual or collective level and finally, empowerment doesn't have a final goal – it is a process. (p. 244) Malhotra also identified how the concept of women empowerment is distinguishable from other forms: it contains the elements of agency and process. Additionally, women are a crosscutting category as opposed to other disempowered groups, they need most focus at the household level and last, require a systematic tranformation against patriarchy rather than institutional. (Malhotra et al., 2002)

I have identified that women's empowerment, with its conceptual nature, milti-dimensional elements, perception as a process, tendency to be measured as an outcome, be subject of frameworks and a participatory evaluation is the epitome of a symbol. Authors, researchers, scholars and development experts have defined it according to their own preference and I believe that in the context of being used in development projects, it is best looked at as a participatory evaluation when being experienced by the women and when looked at from an agency's perspective. It has both theoretical and practical potential but even as a process, its operationalization will be subjective. So if we let the ones being empowered define what it means to them, meanings that emerge will be valuable in identifying whether empowerment 'as understood by them' is taking place or not.

2.4 Women Empowerment – Pakistani context

After reviewing international and local literature on women empowerment, it is important to look at some of the studies and projects conducted which defined, measured and operationalized women's empowerment within Pakistan and in the process, identify the gap that exists which makes the nature of this research a significant contribution.

Every study which talks about it starts with a summary of the conditions of Pakistani society, especially the existing gender division in the prevalent rigid patriarchal culture, with the woman being the good housewife in the private sphere and the man a strong, capable breadwinner, in the public sphere. Family values, Islamic teachings, cultural conditioning and restricted socialization including *purdah*, all shape the life of a woman being raised as a chattel in a Pakistani society. Socio-cultural practices – forced or early marriages, honor killings, dowry killings etc. - also act as threats to a woman's strive for autonomy whilst being modest, moral and upholding the family name. Then there are the hindrances due to lack of education, confidence and access to economic opportunities among many others leaving them structurally disadvantaged.[25] In the light of this background, each study does its best to bring about a change in the status of women by adding to the existing literature on empowerment of women, discussed below respectively.

Khan & Awan (2011), when doing a contextual assessment of women empowerment in Pakistan, used the data from 'Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurements Survey' to analyze dynamics of women decision making in Pakistan, merging it with demographic, education and employment information and calculated the mean of the indicators. For example family planning index score showed that women from NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) have a greater say in family planning decisions than Punjab, Sindh and Baluchistan, followed by an overall average score. They also measured dimensions of autonomy with predictors namely education, employment etc. Data was presented as a percentage (e.g. 70% women without education) and aggregate findings suggested that women from Punjab are more empowered than other provinces (Khan & Awan, 2011). The study aimed to do a contextual assessment and brought empowerment down to numbers through the results of a quantitative survey.

Shabib-ul-Hasan & Mustafa (2012), when talking about professional education of women in Pakistan, referred to their ecomonic empowerment as the key to achieving role transformation. Women in Pakistan are generally submissive and not career oriented, as they put family first. So the authors suggested women's empowerment through technology as a way to give them access to education, and promote a culture with supports career

[25] Khan & Awan (2011), Bibi (2012), Alvi (1991), Ferdous (2005), Siddiqui (2005) etc.

oriented women (Shabib-ul-Hasan & Mustafa, Education to Profession! Challenges of being Women in Pakistan, 2012). The study saw technology as a catalyst to women's economic empowerment in Pakistan, which wasn't clearly defined.

Abrar-ul-Haq, Jali, & Islam (2016) did a study on empowering rural women from Southern Punjab and as a main goal, looked at the association between education and empowerment. To do so, they tried to find out determinants of women empowerment, their employment, engagement in economic activity, household status and educational status. They corelated women empowerment with an ordinary least square regression model with the help of a women empowerment index with variables. The regression analysis showed education (5% increase), working status (5%), household size (5%) and health condition (10%) as contributing to women empowerment in Pakistan. They recommended that women should be allowed to make their own decisions and be provided equal opportunities for education (Haq et al., 2016). This study was highly empirical and the pre-decided determinants defined empowerment as a measure of woman's well being.

Usman Siddiqui (2005) examined women empowerment through representation in political systems in Pakistan and saw it as a goal as well as a means to enhance women empowerment because it will then turn from political to socio-economic empowerment which he deemed important due to the educational status, health issues and employment issues of women. After a very knowledgable analysis, he concluded that higher level of political participation of women (like voting, informal discussions) will lead to the breaking of the social norm that politics is 'alien' to women, and lead to knowledge and ultimately awareness on socio-economic level (Siddiqui, 2005). Similarly, Khattak also discussed women in local government of Pakistan and emphasized on struggles on grassroots levels to achieve empowerment, including NGOs like Aurat Foundation, Shirkat Gah, Rozan, Simorgh and others (Khattak, 2010). The authors focused on the dimension of political empowerment and elaborated on how it can be achieved.

Shahida Bibi (2012) corelated women empowerment with identity pluralism and also linked empowerment of women with economic participation and income independence. In her study, she used women's decision making and participation, mobility and access to public sphere and resources as well as gender-based violence as indicators to answer

qualitative research questions (Bibi, 2012). The author took empowerment to mean the aforementioned indicators and within these spectrums, discussed identity of women, albiet not in much detail. The study was more focused on a detailed discussion on empowerment, with no concise findings.

Asif (2013) conducted research on media's role for women's empowerment in Pakistan and studied the perceptions about women empowerment in upper, middle, lower and wadera (landlords) class. The study was qualitative and was effective in discovering what the locals thought about women's education, decision making, domestic violence, gender discrimination and mobility (Asif, 2013). The aim was to find out perspectives and yet, he used very few narratives and provided more statistical results (e.g. 32% men believed women should be independent in decision making), using the aforementioned dimensions as the general perception of empowerment, using it as a catch-all phrase.

Bushra & Wajiha (2013) also studied the determinants of women empowerment in Pakistan among 200 female respondents of two colleges in Lahore. They used conventional variables and new ones like the variable of women owning bank accounts to measure economic opportunities. Education, poverty, economic participation, cultural and social issues were the main focus in assesing their impact on empowerment of women. They took these variables from a study conducted by Batliwala (1994) and applied to Pakistan, using the SPSS software for analysis. The authors of this study applied pre-defined variables to a new context in an empirical analysis. This leaves room for research that would search for new determinants of women empowerment.

Other similar studies conducted in Pakistan distinguised indicators of women empowerment in Punjab (Chaudhry & Nosheen, 2009) discussed indicators of gender disparity and women empowerment (Lopez-Carlos & Zahidi, 2005) and elaborated on importance of education as a determinant. (Noreen & Khalid, 2012)

Rahman (2013), when talking about it as a concept, offered his view on empowerment within a Pakistani perspective and stated that when defining empowerment, it should be regarded as 'gender empowerment' rather than 'women empowerment' because males also

face exploitation at the hands of the power structure, not just women. This is a different take on the topic, however, is more of a personal opinion than a researched statement.

An international study on women empowerment's social context was carried out by Mason & Smith (2003) which analyzed measures of married women's empowerment in the domestic sphere in 56 communities of 5 countries: Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Thailand and Philippines. The aspects they focused on were economic decision making power, family size decision making power, mobility and husband's control via intimidation, measuring it via scale points rather than proxies. Though this was yet another contextual close ended study, the conclusions drawn were not repetitive like the studies mentioned above.

The authors concluded that social context has an influence over the power relations in the household, all aspects of women empowerment are connected and inter-related to each other and proxy measures (like those used extensively) are problematic in indexing empowerment.

With this, I will conclude the review of the literature. It is apparent from all the work done on women empowerment that not only does it have different meanings in different contexts, but ironically, is used symbolically in studies to stand for generic and self-imposed indicators which have been previously attached to empowerment and have been for several years.

Women empowerment denotes empowering women but the complexity of the concept of power itself infuses into the complexity of defining empowerment. The terms included in defining it overlap with each other like choice, control, power, agency, process etc, but even after acceptance of it being uncertain because of it being a multidimensional concept, contextual and a process, the studies tend to be empirical, focused on using same indicators/variables/measures repeatedly, with no new findings, especially with regard to the published literary work on the topic in Pakistan. The literature on the latter, though recent, is illuminating in discovering how regressive the nature of work on women empowerment in Pakistan really is; its definition – complex as it may be – has been rephrased, re-defined, measured, analyzed and even evaluated in the same parameters again and again.

With its significance in the feminism and development literature, empowerment has been used as a catch-all phrase not only in studies or scholarly works but also development agencies in Pakistan. These funding agencies and NGOs are in a place where they have the power. In this power relationship, they have to accommodate the beneficiaries' empowerment into their own perception of empowerment. This may neglect what the women think, feel or are doing to bring about change that they may define as empowerment. This is the gap that my research attempts to fill, by taking empowerment as a criterion of meaning with both the agency and the women's experiences as its symbolic vehicle.

The literature review helped me understand and select an appropriate methodology and locale for the study – the next chapter explains these in detail.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND LOCALE

This chapter has two sections. The first section sheds light on the research design, explaining the methodology, research methods employed, sources and challenges of data collection, sampling of respondents and data analysis procedure. This is followed by reflections of research process and ethical considerations. The second section provides details about the locale, specifically its selection and related characteristics which describe the research field.

3.1 Research Methodology

The methodology that was applied to this study was of qualitative nature. Qualitative research taps into people's experiences interpretations of their experiences. The goal is to understand the perspective of the research participant in depth, building on the realization that all understanding is constructed and therefore, the participants are going to interpret their own experiences differently. An inductive approach is applied – letting the data speak and not going into the field with a preconceived idea of what the researcher will find. (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009)

Qualitative data aids in understanding the concepts and puts emphasis on the voices of the participants and are suitable when trying to grasp meaning of a phenomenon and facts related to people's lives and experiences. The final written report then includes the voices of participants, reflexivity of researcher, complex description and interpretation of the problem, calling for action. (Creswell, 2012) Since qualitative research studies the subjects in their natural settings and attempts to make sense of the phenomena in terms of the meanings people associate with them, it was the most appropriate choice of methodology when attempting to fill the gap left by the increasingly quantitative literature available on women empowerment in Pakistan.

Since the study was an attempt to understand how women empowerment was perceived and conceptualized within the context of a development project aiming to bring it about in the locale, it also comprised of studying the interaction between the beneficiaries and the development experts on the project platform. Hence, the research also utilized the

methodology of symbolic interactionism put forth by Herbert Blumer which not only complemented the core Anthropological research methods but also served as a qualitative methodology. For Blumer, any methodology to percieve human behaviour should 'get inside the head of' the individual in order to see the world as the individual percieves it. It focuses on intimate understanding rather than intersubjective agreement among investigators. His subjective methodology aims to understand an actor's experience through 'sympathetic introspection'. (Carter & Fuller, 2015) This emic approach was considered appropriate in determining how the development experts and locals conceptualize women empowerment via qualitative techniques which were utilized for procuring authentic data that would shed light on women's empowerment whilst bringing the local women's perspectives to light.

3.2 Research Techniques/Methods

Keeping the qualitative nature of the study in mind, the techniques used in the study were:

- **Rapport Building**

  This is the first step as one enters the field as you have to make the people comfortable with your presence so that you can then observe, record information and talk to them. Rapport building leads to trust which ensures that the researcher's presence doesn't affect the norm. (Bernard, 2006) Rapport building took place in three stages. One, before the field work started, with initial visits to Aurat Foundation (AF) and then to Ahsas Welfare Foundation (AWF), operating in UC 44 and in Dhoke Khabba, to explain the objectives of the study and introducing myself. Second, once the field work was initiated in the locale, with the members of AWF and especially the resource person of UC 44. Last but most importantly, with the local women residing in Dhoke Khabba, which continued throughout the duration of the research.

  From the beginning, the people in AWF office (housing the Agahi centre) treated me with warmth; the atmosphere was friendly and encouraging. I built friendly relations with the staff; eating with them and offering to wash up when finished. In addition, I was careful not to wear short shirts and jeans – instead wearing

traditional long shirts with *shalwars* (wide trouser) as was the norm in the area – so as not to be branded an outsider and to build trust. Further, in the process of building a rapport with the resource person (and my key informant) who also worked as a seamstress, I became her loyal customer and gave her clothes for stitching, for which she was very grateful as the earning helped her pay her children's fees. Rapport building with the local women was done through casual conversations at the meetings conducted and introducing myself. They invited me into their homes themselves and since I was trusted enough to be invited into their personal spaces, it was the start of a good rapport. Inside their homes, I ensured that they didn't feel like I was an outsider, by playing with their children and helping them around the house as I interviewed them. This helped them open up and also resulted in honest answers.

- **Participant Observation**

  This qualitative technique is at the centre of qualitative research as it involves immersing yourself in the culture and environment of your field, then learning to remove yourself from that immersion so that you can put into perspective what you have seen and heard, turning yourself into an instrument of data collection and analysis. (Bernard, 2006) In this instance, I took the role of a 'participant observer' in the activities of Aawaz as an outsider who participated in some aspects of the life around and recorded what I could, in relation to my study. I was a participant in the meetings and study circles conducted as well as a part of the interactions of the resource person with the local women. In doing the latter, I was also influencing the project's collected data of UC 44 as with me there, the resource person had someone to go into the locales with – which she wouldn't have been able to do so alone and collecting the issues of women from their homes.

  I was also a regular participant of the meetings conducted during my field work and the members of AWF went as far as to ask me to make the agenda for the meetings conducted and note the minutes of meeting. It was apparent that they felt I was more qualified than them and therefore would contribute to the quality of the

meetings conducted. However, I felt that this would have an impact on my own research objective of studying the interaction between the agency and the women as conducted normally, so I politely refused. In addition, in a few meetings, I was perceived and forced to speak as a youth representative rather than a researcher, which meant I was an observer turned participant in that duration. In all of the activities, I sat, observed, took down notes and observed the interactions between the women and the members of NGOs.

- **Key Informant**

  According to Bernard (2006), key informants are the knowledgeable people in the locale who understand the information you need and make it easier for you to get it or give it to you with ease. The key informant for my research was the resource person for UC 44, present in the Agahi centre and under whose jurisdiction came Dhoke Khabba as a village. I developed a close and friendly relationship with her during my research. Her role and status in the community – as she also lived in Dhoke Khabba – was monumental in building a rapport with the local women, as she introduced me to them and they confided in me because of my association with her. Contrary to popular belief, the key informant's presence facilitated the informal discussions conducted at the women's homes as they felt more comfortable, rather than being intrusive to the research process. In addition to that, it was a reciprocal relationship as while she facilitated me in conducting my interviews, she also took my help in being more efficient in her own role as a resource person. I helped her articulate the issues in her register and she discussed with me on how to analyze the different cases that were brought up and how to exhibit them. Over the course of my field work, she became a motherly figure to me, showing me affection and assisting me in any way possible, even if it meant going out of her way to do so. I found her experience and knowledge of the village and its people to be very beneficial in providing depth to my research.

- **In-depth and conversational (unstructured) interviews**

  In-depth interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity of having detailed discussions using open ended and closed ended questions, with the help of an interview guide which is a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order. (Bernard, 2006) In-depth interviews were conducted in this research via a self-administered interview guide, probing the respondents to produce more information when needed. They were conducted with both the members of Aurat Foundation, Ahsas Welfare Foundation and the local women. In case of the latter, only a few of the women were able to give me the time required to conduct an in-depth interview. With most of them, I had to adopt an unstructured approach, as they were also catering to their household responsibilities like looking after their children and cooking, whilst talking to me. Interviews conducted with men were short and to-the-point as they were conducted in public spheres like their shops or offices and they were not comfortable with talking to a female in that atmosphere and surrounding.

  While I initially attempted to conduct in-depth interviews and was faced with difficulties, I had to change my methodology in the field, using my skills as a researcher. I then conducted conversational interviews where the topics were guided by my interview guide but not strictly restricted to a certain flow. In addition, I was also advised by my key informant and members of AWF to not take formal in-depth interviews when collecting data from the women, rather, just talking to them and letting the conversation flow. This was more efficient in gathering data from women in their homes. Some of these conversational interviews also provided me with narratives of anecdotal data as once the women started talking, they shared all kinds of experiences with me. While I found it strange that they would trust a stranger with their private issues, I listened patiently as their stories unfolded and provided me with answers to questions I hadn't even asked.

  All the interviews were carried out in Urdu (spoken language of the research

locale) and depending on the type of interview conducted, the length of the interviews lasted from half an hour to two hours.

- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Informal Discussions**

  Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are planned and carried out to discuss a particular topic where six to twelve people take part in the discussion and as a result of which, the researcher gathers qualitative data based on understanding and views on a variety of dimensions of a specific topic. (Creswell, 2012) I was able to conduct three formal FDGs – one of which was conducted in the Agahi centre and two in women's homes. At all three, the focus was on the women's perception about empowerment. When the discussion was conducted at the centre following a meeting, the women were eager in giving their opinions and replying in unison about the hindrances they faced in implementing what was learnt at the meetings during which, they had been quiet. It was interesting to note and may have been because the focus of the open discussion was a topic that pertained to them on a personal level rather than the technicalities of a meeting or a forum. In the two FGDs conducted in the homes, women were even more vocal on the prospect of their empowerment and especially the hindrances they faced.

  Apart from the FGDs, there were four informal group discussions where several women joined in the conversation that was going on and offering their opinions or recounting experiences. These took place in both the homes and at the centre. Informal discussions are an integral part of participant observation as they are impulsive and respondents perceive these as natural conversations. During these discussions, I observed, took notes and let the information flow. The idea was to get the women to open up and let them express themselves on their own terms and at their own pace. I talked to the women informally during these discussions, taking care not to interrupt, and with the help of brief notes made during these discussions, recalled the data collected.

- **Field Notes**

  There are four kinds of notes in field work: jottings, a diary, a daily log and three kinds of formal notes: methodological, descriptive and analytic notes. They are intended to note the day to day experiences or data collected by the researcher as evidence to produce understanding of the phenomenon being studied. (Bernard, 2006) Since field notes are unique to each researcher, written in an un-restricted spontaneous manner, they are reflective of how the research was conducted and an aid in providing the researcher with their own personal way of dealing with the large amounts of data being collected each day.

  Having read up on the advantages of field notes, I used all the techniques provided by Bernard when conducting my own research. Starting with keeping a notepad with me at all times, I made field jottings on the spot – both about my observations, answers to my questions and noting down anything else that I felt was significant. I was transparent about the purpose of my study as I had my notepad with me and didn't attempt to hide that I was making notes. Second, at the end of the day, I recorded and wrote up my field notes formally while I was still able to retrieve details about the day's events and interactions. It was during this time that I also complemented the findings with my own feelings, perceptions and interpretations in the shape of a field diary. I also kept a schedule of what was planned for the next day and what was achieved during the day through a field log (in the shape of a small diary). I also made backups of my notes on the computer daily.

  In making field notes, I made notes about the technique I was using in collecting the data and my respective changes in strategy (methodological notes). A huge part of my notes was descriptive notes from my observations, the answers to my questions - details and explanations. Where I was able to use a voice recorder, the transcribed findings from that also added to my notes. Finally, when writing up my field notes at the end of the day, I also made analytic notes where I read up on the findings and wrote down my understanding with regard to the objectives of my

research, allowing articulate, meaningful and integrated research findings taking shape over the course of the field work.

3.3 Sources of Data

The research utilized both primary and secondary sources of data, qualitative in nature:

- ***Primary data*** was collected with the aid of a semi-structured intreview guide, based on the questions generated in accordance to the objectives, and had open ended questions. It was collected through in-depth and conversational interviews, focus group discussions and informal dicussions with the respondents during participant obervation. The collection of this data was aided by field notes.
- ***Secondary data*** was collected in two stages. One, information was collected on the topic of study through an extensive literature review from books, research articles, journals and reports to develop an in-depth understanding of the research topic and identify a gap. Second, this data constituted the documentation of the development project (Aawaz) provided by the NGOs (AF and AWF) where the objectives, programming and previous activities had been duly recorded. This allowed for a more in-depth comparison of the conceptalizations of empowerment.

3.4 Data Collection and its Challenges

The challenges in data collection were spread out during the course of the field work but the first and foremost challenge was that of the project closing down for three months in January 2017. During this time, I was in the process of finalizing the locale and had already selected Aawaz as my focus of study, having presented the research proposal. The project closing down was a major setback and I then intended to focus on other projects the women in Dhoke Khabba were or had been beneficiaries of, as my major focus was the perspectives of the local women. However, co incidentally, my first day in the field was also the project's first day of re-starting and I ended up not having to change the focus of my study in this regard.

The data was collected over the course of four months, with a break of two weeks in the mid of June due to *Ramzan* and *Eid.* Initially, I didn't plan on putting the research on hold

during *Ramzan,* and did go into the field for the first two weeks of the month. However, it was very challenging to go into the field during the hot temperatures whilst fasting nor did I feel good about making the women talk so much whilst they were fasting (99% of my respondents were Muslims) as they would feel thirsty afterwards. Therefore, as it hindered my own focus as researcher, energy and the quality of conversations with the respondents, I made the decision of pausing the research till after *Eid*.

A major challenge in data collection was the misconception that I worked for Aurat Foundation as an intern. While it aided in building a rapport with AWF, it didn't have a positive impact on my interactions with the local women. I spent a lot of time correcting the resource person when she introduced me as an internee. I could understand that this was the easiest term for the women to understand but I made sure that they understood the real purpose of my presence in their homes and in the centre. This placement 'as an intern' also caused a problem at the grass roots level when one of the members of AWF asked me to write a report on one of the meetings. I had to refuse politely and correct the assumption that I was working for any of the NGOs that the project was affiliated with, emphasizing on the fact that it would be a conflict of interest.

Before I started going to the locale to interview and have discussions with the women, one of the members of AWF sat me down and inquired what I will give to these women in return for their time. Confused, I asked her to explain and she told me that the women are used to an NGO atmosphere and the general perception is that they get something (financial) in return. I then took advice from another senior member, who assured me that yes this was the norm but it wouldn't be a problem if I talked to a few women at a time. Surprised, as this was the first time I was hearing of this and being a student, I didn't have the resources to do it either, I decided to change my methodology and instead of aiming for ten to twelve women for the FGDs, I accommodated a maximum of six women when conducting it in a house and only with women who voluntarily came due to their interest in my research topic.

While it was easier to interact with women who were or had been participants of the project as I was introduced by my key informant, it was more difficult to convince the other women in the village to give me time. I had to introduce myself as being from an NGO when

visiting them, as most of them turned me away when I requested as an independent student researcher. However, while they let me inside their homes when I referred to AWF, they did request me for assistance and to talk to the NGO on their behalf about getting help from them on various financial matters.

When I started conducting interviews and having informal discussions, I realized that while I had my diary with me for the jottings, it was hard to keep track of what was being said, looking into the eyes of the person as well as jotting down words in my diary. It seemed rude to me, so I bought a voice recorder as an aid. However, this acted more as a hindrance than a help. When I asked for permission to record the conversations with the women, they were immediately reluctant to offer their opinions and some even refused outright. Most of the respondents were comfortable with me taking notes in my diary but not with the recorder. Thereafter, I used the recorder for formal in-depth interviews and relied on my memory and field jottings for data collected from conversational and informal discussions.

As the days passed and my interaction with the local women increased, I began to understand the depth of the difficulties my respondents faced on a daily basis because of the realities of their lives – it was like behind every closed door was a woman with her own story of how she was struggling to survive in a patriarchal society, burdened by poverty and swimming against the tide within her own capacity. This lead to a feeling of helplessness and depression, where the women whom I interacted with in the centre also looked at me with beseeching eyes and there was an air of defeat. I felt so bad that sometimes, I didn't feel like asking the women questions regarding my research. Rather, I just sat with them in a companionable silence or other times, listened to their stories for hours, without interrupting and just nodding. This seemed to help the women – they seemed grateful for someone to be there and listening to them talk about their problems. This was a challenge in data collection because it wasn't time spent collecting it, but I perceived it as time well spent.

Finally, a major challenge to my research – from the beginning to the end – was that of my own gender, ironically. In my very first interview with the local focal person and female councillor of UC 44, I was told that it would be very difficult for me, as a young female, to conduct research in the village. Not only because it was against the norms for a young

female to venture out in the streets alone, but also because if something were to happen to me, who would be held responsible. The focal person told me to only go to houses whose women were associated with Aawaz and not to go alone. While I took her advice in stride, I realized that my gender was indeed becoming a hindrance in getting data, not only when I had a hard time convincing the motherly resource person to let me go alone, but also when interviewing the few men who allowed it. I didn't have access to the men, as I couldn't meet the males without a reference as it was against the norm. Those whom I did have access to, were not resourceful in providing data. They didn't appreciate a female invading their comfort zones of offices and shops and asking them questions about women empowerment. Even after probing and being insistent, I didn't get any answers due to the lack of cooperation on their part. The mindset of males was also a hindrance when they were home during my interviews with the women as the women were less eager to talk about anything and my questions were met with silence.

As a researcher, I did my best to put aside my personal beliefs and opinions during the data collection process by being patient, not offering personal comments and having impassive facial expressions during the interactions with the respondents.

3.5 Evolved Grounded Theory Approach with Symbolic Interactionist themes

Since the introduction of grounded theory, the methodology has stemmed into three different schools of thought. One, classic grounded theory which is associated with Barney Glaser; two, evolved grounded theory associated with Anselm Strauss, Juliette Corbin and Adele Clarke and three, constructivist grounded theory, stemming from the work of Kathy Charmaz (Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills, & Usher, 2013). For my research, I have used the evolved grounded theory approach put forward by Strauss, Corbin and Clarke. While grounded theory has its roots in pragmatist philosophy and symbolic interactionist sociology (Clarke, 2003) its general and essential characteristics are that it is used primarily in gathering first hand qualitative data directly from the field, through inductive data collection. The central idea of grounded theory is to read and re-read a textual record and thus identify categories and concepts that emerge from text and then linking the concepts into substantive theoretical formulation or model of reality under inquiry. (Bernard, 2006)

According to Strauss and Corbin (1994), a plausible explanation of the phenomenon under study is presented through a set of relationships in a theory or model, where each interpretation encourages self-reflection and opens up differing possibilities of understanding and perception of the focus of research which, in this case, is women's empowerment.

In a grounded theory study, the researcher negotiates divergent perspectives within the data to produce an integrated theory or model. Conscious awareness of the influence of symbolic interactionism in grounded theory research enhances a researcher's capacity to develop a useful, rich and explanatory theory, especially when trying to understand and interpret the complex nature of human action and interaction. (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012) The centrality of symbolic interactionism to conducting the grounded theory research allowed me to use this evolved grounded theory approach in my own research, especially as the focus of my study was the meanings attached to women empowerment within the context of a development project where the interaction takes place between the local women and development experts.

To provide a background to symbolic interactionism, Herbert Blumer was the pioneer of the the Chicago School of thought and coined the term 'symbolic interactionism', converting Herbert Mead's ideas into an applicable theory. He contended that human behaviour must be studied in the form of action and human groups should be studied in with regard to participants' actions as units. (Blumer, 1969 as cited in Carter & Fuller, 2015) His theoretical orientation is based on three premises:

1. Humans act towards things on the basis of the meanings these things have for them; these things may include physical objects, other humans, institutions, guiding ideals or activities
2. The meaning of the thing is derived from or arises out of social interaction that one has with others
3. Meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by dealing with things they encounter

According to Blumer, the meanings that things have for humans are central in their own right. To ignore the meanings of the things towards people act is seen as falsifying the behaviour under study. Not only that, to bypass the meaning in favor of factors alleged to produce the behaviour is seen as a grievous neglect. (Blumer, 1969).

Now let's assume that one of these 'things' is a guiding ideology; a representation. Rather than being only a thing, it is a symbol. It is a complex category that allows for abstraction, room to apply understandings and interpretations, designed through social interaction. The meaning attached to it (empowerment) is different for each individual in that interaction. Therefore, on the basis of these meanings and perception of empowerment, the individual will deal with what they encounter and respond accordingly.

Thus, rather than 'bypassing the meaning in favor of factors alleged to produce the behaviour' or end results, the focus of research was kept on how empowerment is percieved by all the stakeholders involved in the interaction. Taking all the activities, objects, words and gestures within the empowerment process (and interaction that makes it possible) betweeen the NGO and the locals as symbolic is critical because it is only then that the actual perception of empowerment by both parties could be determined, rather than taking its conceptualization at face value.

It is important to clear one misunderstanding: using symbolic interactionism is not the same as applying a theory that limits the range of theoretical codingby imposing a set of predetermined concepts on the data findings. (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012) Rather than acting as a limit to data collection and analysis, symbolic interactionism provides the researcher with lens with which to view and analyze the phenomena under study, which is what I did during the course of this research, looking at empowerment as a symbolic vehicle for different meanings.

3.6 Data Analysis

The same evolved grounded theory approach was also utilized to analyze the data that was collected inductively from the field, where as per the grounded theory method, the researcher has no predetermined ideas to endorse or reject. In the present work, when showcasing the findings and doing their analysis, verbatims were used to support the

claims. The opinions/answers of the respondents were translated into English. However, for sentences or phrases which had deeper meanings, the verbatim was first provided in Roman Urdu or Punjabi (first languages of respondents) followed by the English translation.

Grounded theory methodology and the complexity of the social research emphasizes the need for developing many concepts and their linkages in order to draw a picture of the variation that the phenomena being studied during a research entails. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 6 as cited in Milliken & Schreiber, 2012, p. 693) Grounded theory approach was useful in providing the process of coding for the research as I reviewed the data and identified the potential analytic categories, comparing and linking them using a mind map. I read and re-read the data collected before I organized the findings into chapters. To capture the variation and progression of perceived empowerment in the particular context of an interaction, I organized my analysis and writeup of the chapters around Mead's four stages of an act which he put forward to understand human action: impulse, perception, manipulation and consummation.

1. *Impulse*: An act begins with a problem to be solved, a goal to be reached, something to be overcome
2. *Perception:* An individual acts in a world that has meaning for him or her at the moment, so they define or understand the objects or ideals in a situation according to those meanings
3. *Manipulation:* Individuals use their environment, act on it, handle it or reasses it according to their use; as a means to an end
4. *Consummation:* This is the end of the act when the goal is achieved

(Charon, 2011)

Social interaction is simply mutual social action that involves symbolic communication and interpretation of one another's acts. Thus, social action and interaction involve taking the role of the other and it becomes symbolic when the actors attach meanings to the objects – in this case, ideology or phenomena – in their environment. Therefore, I found the four stages of act befitting to exhibit and organize the analysis. Finally, the analysis lead to the

formation of a theoretical model, which emerged from the mind map fashioned from the relationships amongst the themes in the data collected. In doing so, captring the variation that is central to empowerment of women where meanings are constructed through situationally specific interpretations and communicated through interaction in the project activities – providing a symbolic perspective.

3.7 Sampling

Sampling is significant in selecting an appropriate number of individuals – a subset from the population – for the research study so that it is representative of the population being studied and results produced are valid.

Sampling Method

Purposive, convenience and snowball sampling were used for the purpose of the research. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to decide the purpose the informants will serve while convenience sampling depends on the availability of the respondents – those who are willing to give time and answer the researcher's questions. Lastly, in snowball sampling, you ask the key informant(s) to locate one or two people in the selected population and then ask these people to liste or recommend others and so on. (Bernard, 2006)

The selection of respondents was done firstly, according to the purpose they served, who were for example, working in AF or AWF as part of the project team and secondly, those who had been declared by the community and organization as success stories and finally, those women who had or had not decided to be a part of the empowerment activities. Convenience sampling method was adopted as a participant observer of the activities, and striking a conversation with the participants who were willing to give me time. It wa also adopted when interviewing the males as I was introduced by the resource person and interviewed anyone who was willing to talk to me.Then, snowball or chain sampling was used where the existing respondents provided introduction to their fellow acquaintances in the locale and thereafter, I visited their homes.

Sampling Unit and Size

I went to the field keeping my criteria in mind, but I had to adjust and strategize the sampling technique to the situation. I made sure that I interacted with enough respondents to ensure that my sampling unit allowed me to gather as much information as possible and data was extracted until there was replication of information and saturation point was reached.

A sample of 50 females and 15 males were interviewed for the purpose of the research where in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 females and 5 males, the rest were either conversationally interviewed or were part of the 3 FDGs and 4 informal group discussions. The sample size was kept large enough to incorporate a variety of perceptions and the research was stopped opun realizing that no new information was coming in.

3.8 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The following three tables show the gender differentiated profile of respondents interviewed for the purpose of the research:

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Charactertistics	**Women**		**Men**	
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Ages				
Between 15-30 years	14	28%	5	33.33%
Between 31-45 years	18	36%	3	20%
Between 46-60 years	10	20%	2	13%
Above 60 years	8	16%	5	33.33%
Educational Level				
Illiterate	18	36%	5	33.33%
Below Secondary	8	16%	3	20%
Matric	15	30%	3	20%

F.Sc/F.A	5	10%	4	26.66%
Masters	4	8%	-	-
Marital Status				
Married	38	76%	10	66.66%
Widowed	4	8%	-	-
Divorced	1	2%	-	-
Single	7	14%	5	33.33%
Languages spoken*				
Urdu	50	100%	15	100%
Punjabi	12	24%	4	26.66%
English	5	10%	2	13%
Ethnicity				
Punjabi	35	70%	12	80%
Pathan	3	6%	-	-
Kahmiri	2	4%	-	-
Other	10	20%	3	20%
Religion				
Islam	47	94%	15	100%
Christianity	3	6%	-	-

* A respondent can speak more than one language, so the total may not add up to 100%

(Source: Fieldwork)

Table 2. Gender Differentiated Occupations of the Respondents

Women			**Men**		
Occupation*	**Frequency**	**Percentage**	**Occupation***	**Frequency**	**Percentage**

Housewives	35	70%	Rickshaw/taxi	6	40%
Maids	4	8%	driver		
Seamstress	6	12%	Shopkeeper	3	13.33%
Teacher	3	6%	Councillor	1	6.66%
Councillor	2	4%	Working in	5	46.66%
Working in	7	14%	NGO		
NGO					

* A respondent is engaged is more than one occupation, so the total may not add up to 100%

(Source: Fieldwork)

Table 3. Categorization of Respondents in accordance to Association with Aawaz

Respondents	**Women**		**Men**	
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Beneficiaries	22	44%	3	20%
Ex-beneficiaries	12	24%	-	-
Nonbeneficiaries	11	22%	9	60%
On project team	5	10%	3	20%

(Source: Fieldwork)

3.9 Reflections of the Research Process

As a researcher needs to be sensitive to the nature of, and conditions governing their own participation as part of their developing understanding of people they study, this section includes my own personal experiences whilst conducting the research and how it affected my interaction with the respondents.

Before going into the field, I was mentally prepared for the culture shock that I would get when I ventured into an area of the city that I had never been to before. However, no amount of mental preparation can soften the blow of that feeling of an outsider in the locale. This is largely due to the difference in life styles, personal preferences and socio-economic status that existed between myself and the respondents and it took me some time to adjust to the conditions of my participation and interaction with respondents every day. From choice of clothes, to hair style to choice of bag to covering my head when going to the houses of the women, I made sure that I would 'fit in' and be regarded as one of them, to build the rapport. However, in the beginning, it was the small things that caught me off guard. A trivial incident (significant and embarrassing for me at the time) was that when I walked down the streets of Dhoke Khabba with the resource person and entered one of the houses of the women. As I walked in, I realized that my right foot was bleeding from a very deep cut. I hid it from both women as I didn't want them to think that I was a city girl who couldn't handle even walking down a street. But since I was in pain, I didn't notice that the room the woman ushered us into was carpeted. She politely told me to leave my shoes outside as she prays in that area. I was embarrassed and left off balance. She then offered me the only chair in the room while she and the resource person sat on the bed. For all my efforts to not become an outsider, I had done just that. I didn't wear open shoes again for the duration of the field work and became friends with both women later on but this small incident left me very cautious of how I behaved in the homes of the women and lesson learnt: not to be so occupied with and conscious about my presence as an outsider that I forget to be more attentive of my surroundings.

Continuing from this perception of 'me and them', I had decided not to bring my mobile phone to the field, as it was very expensive and would not let me fit in if I took it out during interviews. However, I was surprised to find that the local female councillor had a more expensive phone than mine and asked me if I was on Facebook or WhatsApp – applications that I didn't think she would be aware of. I then reminded myself not to jump to any more conclusions with regard to the women and their lives and get rid of the pre-conceived notions shaped by my own life.

The relationship with my respondents was based on mutual respect. However, maintaining the balance of being an insider while simultaneously looking through as an outsider was a difficult task. Over time, the staff of AWF were so comfortable with my presence that they started complaining to me about their personal experiences with Aawaz and gossiped about each other. I listened politely but was careful not to be swept up in the politics existing between the women in the organization because that would have a negative impact on my research. Secondly, the resource person's (and key informant) dependence on me for writing down the issues and going to the locale which she would otherwise not be able to do also made me feel like I was a part of Aawaz team rather than an independent researcher. This was also experienced during conduction of meetings. While I was flattered that they considered me more qualified than them, I was careful not to let my assistance cloud my own findings and corrected the women when they assumed I was a part of the project team.

During the course of my field work, there were days when I was emotionally affected by my experiences and observations in the field; doing a constant comparison of the difference between their lifestyle and living standards and mine. Once, when I was sitting in the home of one of the local women, which was acting as a drawing room, a kitchen, a bed room and a living room with a very small attached bathroom, with three young children running around the small space, she started crying while talking to me. I couldn't remain unaffected and felt my eyes fill with tears. It was in these instances that I understood the perspectives of the local women perfectly, on why they didn't have time for empowerment. Other times, I felt very depressed and helpless – how could one go about breaking the walls around the women to empower them?

A very prominent part of the lives of women in Dhoke Khabba was poverty. While I was in the centre, I interacted with many women who were in dire need of financial assistance and my heart went out to them. I could see from their exhausted faces, their worried eyes and their polite yet desperate words that they were not happy, they needed to change their lives but they couldn't. To some questions, they only stared at me, as if to silently complain why would I even ask that? Couldn't I see they are not empowered? Couldn't I see they don't have power? I could feel it from the way they accusingly looked at me and asked me where I live, what I do. How they clasped my hand in their worn out ones and asked me to

do whatever I could to help. It was very hard for me to remain impassive and not attempt to help them in any way so sometimes, I gave the women money out of my own pocket when I saw what this gesture would mean for their whole family. I knew that it was impulsive on my part but it was difficult for me to not do anything and just ask questions. Therefore, as a researcher, I had to sometimes exchange the role of an unbiased observer with that of an individual with a moral compass.

There were other changes in methodology made in the field according to circumstances faced. When my gender became a hindrance in getting data from male respondents, I decided to not push the cultural boundaries of the area and take what I can get.

When interacting with the women, I made sure that while they knew my placement as a researcher, they would be comfortable in my presence, allowing for honest answers to my questions. Thus, I started my interviews with general chatter about their lives, even helping them around the house as I did so. They then started feeling at ease, as was evident by their smiles and expressions. The resource person stated that my friendly nature was a comfort, which had a positive impact on the trust building between the women and myself. The friendly nature of the interaction helped me gain reliable information required for my research.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics deals with how one treats those who participate in the research and how the data is handled after it has been collected from them. (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009) The ethical considerations adopted during the research process were:

- Consent and willingness of the NGOs associated with Aawaz to conduct my research on the project and use their resources and platform as a participant observer.
- Consent and willingness of the respondents to participate in the interviews and discussions.
- Each participant was informed about the nature and purpose of the research.
- Fair treatment of all respondents and no discrimination showed towards any of them.

- Anonymity of respondents as I changed the original names of the respondents to protect their identity and used pseudo names instead, to respect their privacy and confidentiality.
- During the interviews, I used the voice recorder when permitted. Otherwise, everything was written down shorthand in my diary and asked the respondents to clarify or repeat if I missed out on anything.
- I faced many moral dilemmas during the conduction of research due to the NGO culture, as at times, I was put forth as a youth representative in the meetings but I wasn't from the area, added to the attendance sheet of meetings and once even forcefully given travel cost. It was difficult for me to keep a good rapport intact whilst being ethically right but I did so by politely correcting and reminding them that I was there as a researcher and giving the travel cost money to a beggar in the area.
- Many of the women who came to the meetings were a mixture of women from different villages and at times even different union councils. I ensured that I only interviewed and interacted with women from Dhoke Khabba, to keep the validity and reliability of research intact through true representation.
- I helped out some of the women financially out of my own pocket but ensured that the contribution was anonymous and did it after my research ended so that it wouldn't affect the findings.

3.11 Entry and Selection of Locale

There are many organizations in Pakistan who are currently utilizing the bottom up strategies of the empowerment approach. Since my topic of research pertained to women empowerment, my aim was to approach an organization that solely deals with female centred projects. Aurat Foundation is a renowned organization that not only fulfilled the criteria but had several empowerment projects which were either in the evaluation phase or were on-going. They administration kindly accepted my request to conduct my research and introduced me to the project 'Aawaz' which was a voice and accountability programme in its later phase aiming to promote active citizenship by strengthening women's voices through dialogue and engagement. They also introduced me to one or two prospective

locales in UC 44, Rawalpindi (one of the districts where these projects were being conducted) Among these, I chose Dhoke Khabba because upon my visit to their office in Rawalpindi, I was introduced to a sister foundation that Aurat Foundation works with: Ahsas Welfare Foundation. I was very interested to know how the women in the locale conceptualized empowerment – being the beneficiairies of a project that was being carried out not by one, but two organizations. I was also interested to know how the development experts conceptualized empowerment. Above all, I wished to compare these perspectives with that of the local women.

Thus the NGO provided an entry point but there was no prior commitment or association with the organization, nor am I working for them. However, as an independent effort, this research is beneficial for both academia and the organization because while it sheds light on the complex nature of empowerment from a symbolic interactionist point of view, it is also a monitoring and evaluation as well as a needs assesment study which are crucial for the sustainability of the projects.

3.12 Profile of Dhoke Khabba

The locale selected for the study was Dhoke Khabba, which is one of the villages/towns situated in the heart of Rawalpindi city, adjacent to main Murree Road. It comes under the jurisdiction of union council 44, along with other surrounding villages like Dhoke Ilahe Bakhsh and Dhoke Farman Ali.

3.12.1 Physical settings

Since Dhoke Khabba is situated in Rawalpindi city, its topography is that of a small town rather than a traditional village. However, in the project documentation, it is commonly referred to as the first tier 'village level' where the Aawaz Forum is located (elaborated further in Chapter 4).The infrastructure is that of paved roads leading to main buildings in the area which are mostly plazas housing banks, wedding halls and offices. Dhoke Khabba lies on either side of a market place on the main road leading from Committee Chowk, which has all kinds of shops, stalls, a mosque, convenience stores etc. While this market's road is wide enough for all kinds of vehicles to travel, the small *galian* (streets) opening

from this road, leading to the housing area, are extremely narrow and only wide enough for bikes and rickshaws.

Inside these darkened alleys, the structures of the houses are constructed wall to wall where stairs and small gates have been added haphazardly according to convenience. The streets are inter-linked in a maze of alleys and buildings. While a car would not be able to enter these streets, one would encounter bikes, bicycles, peddlers and other street hawkers calling out their fares. The houses themselves have a different structure in accordance to the street they are situated. Most of them are a single story, not cemented and the gates open up to a courtyard for washing and cooking, while other rooms open into this open space. Other 'houses' consist of a shabby single room, which acts as bed room, living room and kitchen all rolled into one. There is an air of making the most of the space but most of the houses have a traditional village structure with open area verandas having *charpai* (wooden bedstead) in them and rooms leading from it, as well as a common washroom or basin. People who are well off have the same infrastructure of houses, but with cemented walls, double stories, more furniture and cleaner ambiance. The houses have the facilities of water, gas and electricity and also have means of technological communication like televisions, radios and mobile phone signals.

Dhoke Khabba is also adjacent to a huge graveyard and has several mosques. There is a primary school for children in the area but the secondary school and other colleges are located outside the locale on main Murree Road. It is also adjacent to plazas that have many offices of NGOs and also a private health care centre so there is abundance of privately owned organizations in the area working for welfare.

3.12.2 Social and cultural settings

The family structure of the households in Dhoke Khabba is mostly that of extended families. Nuclear families are very few and out of the ordinary. The language mostly spoken in the area is Urdu, followed by Punjabi. Some of the people also speak in Pashto. It is home to people of many different ethnicities, castes and religious backgrounds therefore it would not be possible to list all of them. However, the dominant castes are that of Awans, Rajput, Sheikh and Abbasi. Islam is the dominant religion, followed my Christianity as there is a Christian community residing in the area as well. Dress patterns

of the area are traditional *shalwar kameez* for men and long *kameez* (shirt), *shalwar* (trouser) and *chaddar* (wide shawl) for women, which they cover their heads with, as well. A wide majority of the women either wear *burqas* (veil) or take these wide shawls when venturing into the streets.

The literacy rate of the area is high compared to other villages in the area (this information was provided by the local Union Council office but they couldn't provide figures to support their claim.) Men and women alike have either passed matric or studied till secondary. However, many of the women in the area are illiterate or have only studied till 5th grade and gotten married.

3.12.3 Economic and political settings

Major fields of occupation for the men in the locale are that of the local shop ownership in the market, rickshaw and taxi drivers, handy men, laborers, working in cement industries or tailors. The women (if earning) do the jobs of house maids, teachers, seamstress and working in the local NGOs. The people living in Dhoke Khabba are of lower middle and lower class status and poverty is rampant in the area.

There is awareness of the political parties as there are local male and female councillors for UC 44 residing in the area but the participation of local citizens in the political setting stops there. Local people are aware of the local offices of the councillors where they may get financial assistance or groceries when a campaign is being run but most of them don't have their CNICs made.

Now, we move on to the next and first of the chapters on the findings and analysis of data gathered.

4. IMPULSE: GOAL TO BE ACHIEVED

As already explained in the previous chapter, out of the four stages Mead put forth to represent an understanding of human action, the first is impulse. Charon (2011) summarized this stage as a state of disequilibrium; a problem to be solved; a goal to be achieved; something to be overcome or 'a generalized disposition to act' (p. 121). This signifies the beginning of an act and since the concept of 'impulse' at this stage is vague and hasn't been elaborated upon in available literature, I have used Charon's application of the word to shed light on the goal to be achieved in this context – that of the development project i.e. Aawaz[26] thereby identifying the understanding and objectives associated with the women's empowerment project.

This chapter is divided into two sections; the first section provides details about the objectives, structure and programming of the project relevant to the research and the second section looks into the operationalization of the project in the locale, essentially sketching a picture of what has been done under the umbrella of Aawaz in the past three and a half years to provide a context for analyzing the broad spectrum of empowerment of women residing in the locale. The data exhibited in this chapter was acquired through project documents provided by the development agency, unless otherwise stated. All claims and statements related to the project put forth in this section have been made by the agency in lieu of the project documents and website, some of which I didn't explore further because it was outside the scope of my research.

4.1 About AAWAZ – an introduction

Aawaz, keeping in line with the word's literal translation from Urdu, is a voice and accountability programme which is a 5-year long project (from 2012-2017) being implemented in 45 districts of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Four civil society organizations are responsible for carrying it out as consortium partners: Aurat Foundation (AF), South Asia Partnership Pakistan (SAP-PK), Strengthening Participatory

[26] Aawaz as a word translates into 'voice' in Urdu and several other languages in Western Asia region.

Organization (SPO) and Sungi Development Foundation (SDF) while Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) is the management organization. The programme is in its fifth and final year of implementation and Dhoke Khabba in district Rawalpindi is one of the villages where it is being implemented, under the supervision of the Aurat Foundation and its partner organization at community level: Ahsas Welfare Foundation.

Aawaz as a project is programmed to support an empowered, mobilized and participatory minded citizenry, creating critical voice channels in the form of an active civil society with the focus on women and their voices.

4.1.1 Goal and outputs

The goal of Aawaz is to strengthen a stable, inclusive and tolerant democracy in Pakistan which caters to the needs of the people by emboldening the struggle of men and women and realization of their rights as citizens with special focus on women and excluded groups. The programme views democracy through a gendered lens, aiming to contribute to women's political empowerment through open, inclusive and accountable democratic processes.

The programme has four distinct outputs:

1. Women better able to participate safely in politics and public spaces at federal, provincial and local levels in KP and Punjab
2. Citizens and communities better able to resolve disputes peacefully and work together for common solutions in KP and Punjab
3. Women and other excluded groups better able to demand improved delivery of services in KP and Punjab
4. Improved evidence gathered, synthesized and communicated/advocated to political leaders/decision makers in KP and Punjab

(Source: Retrieved from http://www.af.org.pk/AAWAZ/outputs.html)

Activities under the first three outputs contribute to and are strengthened by output 4. As this research was carried out at the local level, the first three outputs are significant with

regard to women's involvement. The activities under these outputs are linked at this level to ensure that women and other marginalized groups are enabled and encouraged to participate in community processes and decision making, gain political voice and are able to articulate their priorities. Aawaz brings this about by reduction of violence against women and increasing their safe participation in order for them to work together to solve local problems and hold government accountable (further elaborated in subsection 4.2.2 on activities conducted.)

4.1.2 Institutional Framework

In order to carry out the activities for the outputs, Aawaz consists of a tiered organizational structure to help the beneficiaries organize at different levels. The first tier is at the village/town/settlement level, called the Aawaz Village Forum (AVF). The second tier is at the union council level, called Aawaz UC Forum (AUF). The third tier is at tehsil level, called Aawaz Tehsil Forum (ATF). At district level, the fourth tier called the Aawaz District Forum (ADF). Then come the fifth and sixth tiers of provincial and national forums. Two members from each Aawaz (village) Forum are members in Aawaz UC Forum. Then ten to fifteen of these are members of Aawaz Tehsil Forum and then nominated members are then members of Aawaz District Forum and so on. For every 100 villages, there are 10 UC forums, 1 district forum, 2 provincial forum and 1 national forum.

Aawaz *Agahi*[27] Centres (AAC) were established at the start of the project as resource centers at the Union Council level, with a respective resource person, housed in a community based partner organization's office to disseminate awareness material and provide technical support to Aawaz Village Forums.

In the context of this localized research, the tier of utmost significance was that of the village level; Aawaz Forum, as a collective platform for individual participation of women. The focus was on the Aawaz Agahi Centre for Union Council (UC) 44, under the jurisdiction of which Dhoke Khabba was situated as this served as a resource center as well as a meeting place; the activities carried out at the bottom level at the Agahi Centre were

[27] Roughly translates into awareness and information

under study while looking at the operationalization of empowerment via interactions between the development agency and the women. Further, I also identified the perceptions and experiences of women living in the village who may or may not have been the beneficiaries of the project.

In order to further understand the objectives of the project within the parameter of empowering women, it is important to look at the functions of the Village Forum with regard to programming under the three outputs being carried out at the grass root level. The necessary information was obtained from the project's final output manual.

4.1.3 Village level programming – functions and activities

4.1.3.1 Women's Political Participation

Aawaz Forum is responsible for carrying out activities concerning women's safe and effective participation in political and public spheres. The functions include but are not limited to creating awareness on recently passed women friendly laws through dialogues and discussions aimed to inform and mobilize to demand implementation, creating understanding for women dignity and well-being as a fundamental right, encouraging women to participate in electoral processes, creating space for women to hold decision-making positions in political parties, ensure their participation in meetings and rallies conducted and providing the upper tiers with relevant information to allow advocacy.

To fulfill these functions, awareness raising and sensitization initiatives were programmed on the issues of importance of women's role in decision making, women's participation in political processes, gender based violence, importance of having a CNIC, gender equality and ethical responsibility of casting vote. These activities were planned to be conducted through focus group discussions, corner meetings, showing videos on empowerment, rallies, festivals, celebrations and other events.

Secondly, another major activity was the orientation and training of the Aawaz Forums where the orientation sessions/meetings focused on gender, laws, rights of women, women's decision making and women's political participation, allowing the discussion to

create a greater understanding. And finally, collection of data from households where adults are not registered voters or don't have CNICs.

Therefore, under this output, the programming had a two-fold approach: first, creating awareness of their rights and training women to have a deeper understanding and second, mobilizing them to act upon the information they have received by motivating them to create CNICs and cast votes or wider political participation.

4.1.3.2 Dispute/Conflict Resolution and Social Cohesion

Aawaz Forum's role is to promote peace and tolerance to allow for peaceful resolution of disputes and then collaborating to come up with solutions. The functions include but are not limited to creating a safe space in the locality for discussion and dialogue to eliminate risk of conflict among ethnic, sectarian and religious groups, build community's understanding about the processes of conflict resolution, inform about laws and in case of violation of law, provide information about the services responsible for protection and conflict resolution and educate people about tolerance and harmony.

Activities to fulfill these functions are orientation at the village level for assessment and identification of disputes at local level especially to understand the challenges generated for women, identify service providers to resolve conflicts and acquire negotiation skills. Second, follow-up on the conflict resolution process without direct intervention. Third, provision of legal and technical assistance by providing information on 'how to' as a guide about laws, FIR registration, filing suit in court etc. Finally, conduction of cultural and peace events to promote social harmony among groups.

It can be seen that under this output, the project approach is to pre-empt conflicts by creating a peaceful environment and in the presence of a conflict, allow space for negotiation and resolution by assisting via knowledge and guidance to existing dispute resolution mechanisms.

4.1.3.3 Social Services

The role of Aawaz Forum is to voice priorities and hold government accountable for

adequate service delivery, especially in health and education sectors. The functions include but are not limited to creating awareness about local provisions of health and education, primary data collection of identifying needs to create demand for provision of these services at community level, evaluate the facilities available and hold authorities accountable for poor delivery.

Activities then include orientation to monitor and oversight the prioritized social services (and other socio-economic issues) and carrying out evidence based advocacy. Members would also be made aware of the minimum standards in education and health. Second, making the school councils (SCs) and school management committees (SMCs) functional and develop education/health plans. Finally, organizing local level awareness raising initiatives on health and education.

With focus on health and education, this output signifies the role of raising voice to hold the government accountable for service delivery by first identifying the issues that the women face and then demanding provision and delivery by partnering with existing local committees.

4.2 Initial operationalization of Aawaz in Dhoke Khabba (UC 44)

Now that light has been shed on the necessary information pertaining to the overall objectives of the project, its structure and the planned programming through the activities at the village level, it is important to provide a summary of its implementation within the selected locale. This is to establish a context to the experiences and perceptions of the women provided in the coming chapters. It is also important keeping in mind the short time frame of the research, whereby I was only able to observe four months in the last phase of the five year project - while this was sufficient enough to discover local women's perceptions, it meant that I was dependent on the information acquired via observed meetings and interviews in the field about the initiatives already undertaken at village level under the three outputs.

4.2.1 Formation of Village Forum and Agahi Centre UC 44

The Agahi Centre for UC 44 was situated in the office of Ahsas Welfare Foundation, which is the partner/sister organization working with Aurat Foundation to implement the project at the local level.

However, I was told by the resource person Irum that this was not the location of Agahi centre at the start of the project. She lives in Dhoke Khabba and shared her initial experience, saying:
"When Aawaz started, the Agahi Centre was in my house and since I already used to stitch clothes for the women in my area, I knew the women in my street and in the village. First, I called the women around to the meetings – they were hesitant but they came because they knew me. When the project started, the women didn't know what an Agahi centre was, they came because they were curious about what was happening."

In the initial stages, the project relied on the resource person's personal connections with the women in the locale to spread awareness about its presence. Situating the Agahi Centre in a place with which the women were already comfortable and in the private sphere would have served as a huge advantage. It then shifted to an office space in the public sphere as the project gained momentum - structures were created and more people became participants overtime.

According to national program manager of Aawaz:

"After the inception phase which included only Sargodha and Multan, Rawalpindi was included as a district in the first phase in April 2013. In the second phase, there was mobilization on the village level; forum formation started in May 2013 and we had consultation meetings in the villages creating a village forum. It was almost a two years' process. We created structures, selected people and that took time. We did village profiling to find out what issues are there. There were then activities on awareness raising on village and UC levels and creating mechanisms for engagement through initiatives in the third and fourth year. There was village level, then tehsil level for the first 3 years and then finally

district level. Now that the project is in its last stages, there may not be many village level activities. There are even less people than before in the overall team."

In general terms, the project launched in Dhoke Khabba with the creation of village forum in the houses, and then establishment of Agahi Centre of UC 44, in district Rawalpindi, which then became the center for the activities and meetings carried out under Aawaz for the duration of the next three years.

4.2.2 Summary of initiatives undertaken

It will be difficult to go into all the details of the initiatives undertaken in the locale under the umbrella of Aawaz for the respective outputs over the course of the project's long life. Therefore, I will quote the summary provided by the Aawaz management team from Aurat Foundation at the meetings I attended; outlining the major initiatives that took place with women from Dhoke Khabba as participants in their own words:

"Our thematic areas are gender and women political participation. Second, conflict resolution. Third is social services and accountability. So all the outputs are related to these three thematic areas and to achieve the output we used certain approaches like awareness, building capacities, skills, and mobilization."

1. **Output 1: Women's political participation**

   "We did awareness sessions so that women knew about the latest laws and importance of political participation. In case of no CNICs, birth registration, *nikkah* registration and domicile problems, we linked the women to different organizations. There was *Nadra* van campaign, where these vans were parked in the locality for easy access. We prepared mock voting sessions, mobilization camps and observation cells to motivate women to vote in general elections. Agahi Centers helped women can talk to each other and find support and have a place for mobility so that there is *khwateen ki shamuliat* (participation of women). We gave the women decision making power by bringing voting system into the forums where they voted for president of the forum. Another initiative was *Jamhuriat Aangan se Awaan tak*, which aimed to teach that democracy starts at the household level."

2. **Output 2: Dispute/conflict resolution and social cohesion**

"There were many reasons for conflicts but we fixed them to 3 areas: Harassment of women at home, sectarian issues and interfaith issues. These conflicts are barriers to participation so that's why Aawaz put forth Output 2. When we started working with women, we found that being a woman is a challenge in political participation as they have to work hard to even get a seat so mechanisms were created to solve this issue. The hurdles for political participation like *tashadud* (violence) and lack of mobility were catered to, that exist due to patriarchy because of which the women can't raise their voices. *Haq e raye nai dya jaata* (there is no right of opinion). For example, *Aawaz utha* (Raise your voice) campaign of local government, *Hum Awaz* campaign and *Bolo Zimedari Se* (Anti hate speech campaign) and created a 'youth circle of influence' so that many people can be mobilized."

"We created 'early warning system' (EWS) and 'early response mechanism' (ERM) for conflict preemption. Steps involved were identification of people by village mapping and creating peace connectors, giving them skills so that when they solve the issues, a woman may not be punished because she is a woman, same goes for Christians and other minorities. We created peace committees in *Moharram*, keeping the EWS in mind. We saw which areas came in the red zone in the sense of sectarian conflict and we had dialogues with minorities, security plans were shared by police etc. *Is tarha hamne tanazaat ka pur amn hal nikalne ki koshish ki* (we tried to figure out peaceful solutions to conflicts). We then planned local level peace events like Diwali, matches with youth, embroidery competition etc. We also created connections through peace building dialogues so that the differences don't get in the way of peace."

3. **Output 3: Social Services**

"Social services are provided by the institutions like colleges and hospitals made by the government which needs to be held accountable if services are not better.

> We wrote applications, conducted meetings so that issues were brought forward, made village development plans and then planned a *khuli kacheri* (open court) where we called the local people as well as representatives from the government so that the issues were resolved and synergies were made between the different organizations who are responsible."

While discussing the duration of the project's life before the conduction of this research, it is important to state that the project shut down for the duration of three months – January 2017 to March 2017. It re-started in April 2017, which is when this research was conducted. This has already been mentioned in the previous chapter with regard to the challenges this circumstance posed while selecting the locale for my study. However, I was fortunate enough to observe the meetings which summarized the project's achievements in the area as a reminder for the local women as well as other stakeholders which allowed me to collect the data exhibited in this section.

4.3 Discussion

The data set forth in the sections above has given a clear picture of the overall objectives of the project i.e. the goal to be achieved. This provides an understanding of empowerment from the perspective of the programming of project; the perspective being implemented by the development agency in the shape of activities that had already been and were being conducted during the course of my research.

Being a voice and accountability programme, Aawaz falls under the sphere of political empowerment. True to its goal of strengthening the capacity of women to raise their voices and holding the government accountable for inefficiency in service delivery, the three outputs implemented at the grass root level in Dhoke Khabba do just that. They focus on engaging women to increase participation, dealing with one of the barriers that would prevent this i.e. conflicts and lastly, tackling service delivery by identifying the issues women face, with focus on health and education respectively.

By highlighting political participation, conflict resolution and social services, the project programming makes it clear that there was a lack thereof women's political inclination,

existence of disputes and inefficient delivery of services in the area. It aimed to remedy this by empowering the women through awareness, mobilization, capacity building and training whilst giving them platforms to raise their voices.

The institutional framework of the project itself is much like a political hierarchy. I found this to be very interesting with regard to giving the women authority and boosting their self-confidence by allowing them to speak on behalf of their forum on the higher levels. However, the locale-specific, in-depth nature of my research didn't allow for a detailed investigation of all these levels as it was essential for me to spend more time with women from Dhoke Khabba, unveiling their perceptions about women's empowerment.

Political empowerment is the highest level of women's empowerment, resulting from social and economic empowerment which is also portrayed by the former. This is because to achieve political empowerment, women should be empowered socially and economically. Higher level of women's political participation would tackle gender hierarchy by challenging socio-cultural contexts. (Siddiqui, 2005) It can therefore be said that no sphere of women's empowerment can stand alone. While the project aimed to politically empower women, it would have had to cater to the social and economic factors which came into play when mobilizing women at the village level.

Within this gendered empowerment approach to development adopted by Aawaz, the outputs and their subsequent contribution to the overall goal is made clear in the documentation as well as the specific activities planned to bring them about. These activities like *Jamhuriat Angan se Awaan tak, Awaaz uthao* and above all, creation of *Agahi* Centre as a safe space for women to raise their voices sound very promising on paper and whilst being summarized as achievements. It remains to be seen whether they had the required empowering impact that the project aimed to achieve. My research also acts as an evaluative study in this regard as the perceptions and experiences of the participants living in the locale are outlined in the coming chapters.

Aawaz is the epitome of the image evoked by international and national development agencies when they address the empowerment of women in a developing country like Pakistan, offering quick solutions through outputs to the problems that these women might

be facing. This rhetoric of empowerment as the product of a development initiative translates into reality through the activities conducted and whether it is inhibited or encouraged by the knowledge and experiences of women it aims to empower is dependent on the perceptions of the women themselves.

It is now important to investigate the perspectives of the local women. While Aawaz focuses on the empowerment of women as individuals, they are never disconnected from other individuals, local norms, values and traditions. The complex, lived realities of the women's lives are a necessary component as are their personal opinions on what they believe empowerment is, if this interaction is to be studied symbolically because their perspectives on empowerment may or may not differ from the rubric of the project. The next chapter sheds light on these indigenous perceptions within indigenous structures and systems.

5. PERCEPTION: DEFINITION OF CONCEPT/SITUATION

Perception is the second stage in Mead's four stages of an act, arising from the understanding that an individual acts in a world that has meaning for him or her at that moment or in that particular situation. This selective and ongoing perception and definition – in an act – is done in order to reach the goals aimed to solve the impulse or problem identified at the beginning. (Charon, 2011, p. 121) This means that individuals have a certain understanding of the objects, ideals or activities in their environment before they choose to act.

After familiarization of the project's understanding (and devised application) of empowerment in the previous chapter, I have applied Charon's understanding of this stage to my research findings by focusing on empowerment as defined and perceived by the women in the locality. This is needed both as a context and a pre-condition, before elaborating upon their interaction with the development agency vis-à-vis the activities of the project.

When I asked the respondents their perspectives on empowerment, they replied in a variety of ways: either telling their perception of the word or process itself, or sharing their experiences in trying to make me understand how it can be achieved and in other instances, why it is not possible to get empowered.

In the light of the data collected, this chapter begins with how empowerment is defined by the local women and the members of the organizations implementing the project, going on to elaborate on the women's understanding of how empowerment is achieved, complementing that with a discussion on their understanding of Aawaz as a project for empowering women. The latter half of the chapter provides details on the hindrances to empowerment - readily disclosed by the women when discussing its achievement – followed by an analysis of the contextual factors that inhibit empowerment, culminating in a short debate on whether they believe their empowerment is possible. In the last section, an analysis is provided on the perception of empowerment by the local women.

5.1 Empowerment defined

It has been established that empowerment is a contested term which consists of complex, interrelated elements intertwined with behavior, relationships, values and knowledge. Not only is there no common definition but it is inappropriate to determine people's experience of empowerment for them. Therefore, the best way to approach it is with the voices and opinions of people who know what empowerment means to them and who asses it with their experiences. (Jupp & Ali, 2010) In this case, these would be the women residing in Dhoke Khabba, who were the target population for the project.

5.1.1 As defined by the local women

When telling what they think empowerment means, the respondents either shared what they perceived it to mean literally in general terms or shared their understanding of it from experience and personal beliefs.

For working women, empowerment meant raising their voice, standing up for their rights and gaining confidence from education.

Shehla, a lady doctor working from a local health center, opined:
"Mere khayal se jab aurten apni baat manwa saken. Ba ikhtiar us waqt hoti hain jab kisi mushkil mein awaaz uthaen aur unki awaaz sunni jae." meaning *"*I think it is when women can get people to listen and do what they say. When they raise their voice in difficulty and their voice is heard."

Similarly, Raila, a matric student working as a sales person, said:
"*Iska matlab hai haq ko dabne na dena* (it means not letting rights be usurped) When she (a woman) takes a stand because she is educated, she feels confident and it means she is empowered."

Dilshaad, a local councilor, was of the opinion:
"Iska matlab hai apne huquq pata hona, matlab agar koi masla ho tou usko solve ker sakein. Agar nai ker saktay tou aap ba ikhtiar nai hain" meaning "It means knowing your

rights, like if there is a problem then you should be able to solve it. If you can't solve it, then you aren't empowered."

For younger women, empowerment meant freedom to live the way they want and making their own choices in life whether it was major life decisions or deciding what to buy or what to wear.

Fiza, aged 26, said:
"Empowerment means that the woman should spend her life according to her own wishes. I really want to go abroad and I will even wear jeans out there, with no one to tell me what to do."

Zehra, aged 30, opined along the same lines:
"It means living life by your own choices. When you want to buy something, then you can buy it according to your choice and not being dependent on anyone. *Apni khuwahishat ko khud pura karna* (fulfilling your wants yourself).

Tabassum, aged 22, simply said:
"To be able to do whatever one wants. Freedom."

Some of the women defined it in terms of handling finances and thus being independent.

Saima, a 51 year old housewife, said:
"*jab aurat kisi ki muhtaj nai hoti aur apna kharcha khud uthati hai*" meaning "when a women is not dependent on anyone and deals with her expenditure herself."

Nusrat, a 46 years old housewife, stated:
"*Rozgar* (employment) at home like sewing or giving tuitions or starting a committee. I think women should be able to do a task at home so that she can give time to housework as well. It would allow her to cover small expenses."

So while an empowered woman should be able to cover her expenses, her empowerment need not occur outside her home. She has other responsibilities which she cannot overlook when she becomes empowered through employment. In the same context, several other

women explicitly defined empowerment as occurring within the parameters of a woman's home, in terms of her responsibilities as a house wife.

Razia, a married 35 years old and housewife:
"When a woman has all the responsibility of the house, they have to carry it through. If they leave it in the middle, then their husband would say to them that it was your responsibility. When women fulfill their responsibilities the right way, they have a say."

Ayesha, a married 41 years old (resource person and housewife):
"Empowerment for a woman means having responsibility, within the house. It doesn't mean that we have the upper hand over the men."

Sana, a married 37 years old and housewife:
"*Ba ikhtiari wo hai jab aurten apni zimedari ko apni zimedari he samjhen aur bhagen na unse* (Empowerment is when women understand their responsibilities to be their responsibilities and not run from them). Like women depend on their husbands that they will bring the grocery, it shouldn't be like this. The women should go out themselves and get things themselves, rather than complaining."

Therefore, for these women, empowerment of a woman is in her own hands, by fulfilling all her responsibilities as a house wife and not depending on the males for assistance in this regard, so that she is considered responsible enough to be asked her opinion or 'have a say'. Also, empowerment doesn't mean that they exert power over men, rather alongside them, whilst catering to their responsibilities.

Another woman also gave her opinion in a similar context:
"I think a woman is born empowered and as she grows up, it depends on her to keep that power. If a woman is *gharelu* (home maker) and a good woman whom no one complains about, she is empowered. *Ghar acha basana is ba ikhtiar hona* (making a good home is empowerment) If a woman is not a good house wife, then nobody else will be good to her and she will face problems in her life. An empowered woman would follow the teachings of Islam." (Maham, 45, Islamic teacher)

While she saw empowerment as something that the woman is born with and keeps that power through her actions as a good house wife i.e. within the private sphere, she ended her opinion with a statement that suggested religious influence in her perception of empowerment. A few other women also provided opinions on women's empowerment within religious parameters.

Tahira, a married 30 years old and housewife:
"I think it means when a woman isn't dependent on anyone and doesn't need anyone's permission to go to the market as well. She would have freedom but should be in *parda* (covering herself) when she goes out of the house because that would show she is a good, honorable woman."

Nasia begum, a married 63 years old and housewife:
"Empowerment doesn't mean that the woman hang around freely or do whatever she wants. Our religion doesn't allow that. *Shohar k haquq mein reh k ba ikhtiar honay ki koshish karay* (should try to be empowered within the rights of her husband)."

Nazreen, a 50 years old widow and seamstress, stated: *"Mere khayal se ba ikhtiari Islam ki hudood mein reh k awaaz uthana hai…aurat hudood k dairay mein reh ker ba ikhtiar ho sakti hai but hudood k dairay se bahar na niklay. Matlab sunnat pe amal karay. Bahar nikaltay waqt sar dhanp k niklay aur mardon k sath bethne se parhaiz karay. Hamara mulk he Islam k naam pe bana tha*" meaning "Empowerment is to raise voices but within the limits of Islam. A woman can get empowered by staying in her limits but she shouldn't cross them. Meaning whilst following the teachings of the Holy Prophet. Like covering her head when she goes out and avoiding sitting with the males. Our country was created in the name of Islam."

So women's empowerment is defined within the parameters set by religion, which demands from the woman to cover herself, protect her modesty by not interacting with the opposite sex whilst raising her voice for her rights or any issues that she may be facing. A woman may have freedom, but the parameters of that freedom are decided for her through her religion.

It can be seen that the women perceived empowerment in accordance to their age, experience, employment status and personal beliefs. Their definitions are also shaped by the right to take decisions regarding their body (how they dress), mobility, participation in the public sphere, right to seek employment and aligned with and in relation to how they are constrained by society. While there were general perceptions of raising voices for rights, gaining confidence through education, freedom of choice and independence through employment, there were also some less traditional perspectives of empowerment (drawing from my understanding from academic literature available) like catering to household responsibilities to obtain a respectable, trust worthy role within the family and the importance of women's empowerment being exercised within religious parameters.

It is interesting to note, however, that none of the local women defined empowerment in a political context[28] except when associating it with 'rights and raising a voice', and even then defining it within limits. The question is that does this mean they are not aware of gaining power politically or they are aware but prioritize other perceptions of empowerment over this one, keeping their own realities in mind.

5.1.2 As defined by members of the development agencies

While the definitions provided by the local women are important when looking at personal perceptions attached to empowerment, it was just as significant to discover how it was perceived and defined by the development experts who were implementing the project on the grass root level. Some of them gave to the point answers to the question of what they believe is empowerment, drawing from their knowledge within the development sector:

"It means *faisla sazi* (decision making). Women get money by earning it but if they don't have control of what is done with the money. So they aren't empowered unless they can make the decisions." (Azka, 57)

"Empowerment is that we should teach the women skills and provide a woman with things according to their skills as well as location where she can sell them." (Shafqat, 30)

[28] Political context here means in relation to the goals and institutional framework of the project

“I think empowerment is when you participate equally in all your decisions. Your voice be heard and your decisions be respected and given your due share.” (Noreen, 45)

Empowerment here, is put into the already established boxes of definitions and factors to measure it when attempting to define it: decision making, providing skills and equal participation. On the other hand, some of the individuals who are part of the development agencies provided their perspectives on empowerment which arose from their own experiences whereupon they achieved empowerment themselves and defined it on this basis.

The local resource person at the Agahi centre, Irum, shared:
“Just stepping outside was empowerment for me. Women who have lived their whole lives at home get the confidence just from being in public. I used to stitch at home but I would have felt empowered by going out even if I had not been earning. It (being outside the house) was the main thing. I still feel *ehsas e kamtari* (low self-esteem) from the fact that I stepped outside so late. If I had done it earlier, where would I have been now? The trainings that I got at the start benefited me and gave me confidence but even before working here, I started going to rallies and volunteered. I thought if other women can do it, then why can’t I?”

For her, even venturing into the public sphere from the private sphere was empowering. She didn’t have the confidence that she now has, and she gained it by going outside. So from her experience, empowerment may or may not be found within the confines of the home but it is definitely acquired by interacting in the public sphere. As for the perspective of a woman who was already working in public sphere, empowerment means something else entirely:

Rahat, one of the founding members of Ahsas Welfare Foundation, shared:
“When I became counsellor in the past, people came to me and asked for help like getting get dowry made. I didn’t like to ask for this money from my husband so I created a team and said that we will do funding for this. One of the councillors said that I can’t afford money so I told him to just give what you do for business – socks. My brothers opened a clothes shop in China market because of me as I had to give these things in dowry to help the women. We have many different shops now. So when we talk about empowerment, it

is about *rozgar* (employment) I myself am empowered because I took matters into my own hands. I am proud of the fact that I did it myself but also made my brothers open a clothes shop. Men can do business and have a cart or something but unless the women don't do anything to earn for themselves, they cannot be empowered. I earn for myself, as well as my children as well as the women who ask for help."

As a councillor, she was already individually empowered enough to have the confidence and self-esteem. However, from her experience, she only saw empowerment as taking place when her political individual empowerment evolved into economic empowerment; making her perception on empowerment also an economical one: gaining employment. Then, coming to the perspective of a woman who has gainful employment with Aurat Foundation, empowerment changes shape:

"I feel that empowerment is not that you go after only your own rights. I am a social activist, and I take care of other people's rights as well. When a woman steps out, she has to face challenges. Sometimes, I feel I am empowered. Sometimes, I feel I am not. It is very challenging. You must know what your right is and you should be able to avail that right, but you should also know why you are not asserting for someone else's right. I may know my right but I compromise in the face of other important things, like family ties. So empowerment is that you know your rights and responsibilities but you know others' rights too and don't take advantage of them in the process." (Faiza, Program Manager)

She looked at empowerment in the context of knowing and availing rights but not only your own, but also of those around you. Her perception arose from her role as a social activist and the empathetic approach of thinking about others as well as oneself. She also saw empowerment as prioritizing what's important and compromising in the face of that judgment. Empowerment then becomes a vague concept even within the definition of knowing one's rights and availing them.

The analysis of the data then reveals that every woman not only has a different perception of empowerment, but also has strong opinions on how other people should perceive empowerment. The differences that exist between these women stem from their ages, employment status, marital status, religious beliefs and above all, lived experiences which shape their respective perspectives.

5.2 Achieving empowerment

When I asked the women what they thought empowerment meant to garner their perception about it, some of them replied by telling me how it can (or cannot) be achieved, rather than or in addition to telling me a specific definition. I found these women's perception of empowerment to be nestled in practicality and further, setting the context for outlining hindrances based on their experiences.

5.2.1 How is it achieved?

According to some women, achievement of empowerment is largely based on the mentality of both men and women, impressing on education being the source of empowerment which would ultimately lead to the right socialization:

"*Zehniat ka kaam hai ye sara. Hamara zehn aisa hai k hamare khandaan k mutabiq hai. Mere abba aur bhai parhay likhay hain magar mene sirf panchwi jamat tak parha hai aur mujhe apne susral k hisab se rehna parta hai. Unki zehniat ko sath le k chalna hota hai*" meaning "It's all about mentality. Our mentality is according to our families. My father and my brothers are educated but I have only studied till 5th grade. I have to live according to my in-laws, and their mentality." (Faseeha, 44, works as a maid)

Her education was short-lived and now she denotes being married and following her in-laws' 'mentality' as opposed to being educated which would have made her empowered. Here, it is also significant to observe that she considers a woman's thinking to be structured according to her family values as a hindrance. In similar tones, Shehla, the lady doctor working in a local health center in the locale, gave her opinion on education being the way to be empowered; not only of the women but also the men, from a young age:

"There should be education from the beginning in schools, where the children should be taught that they are equal. If the mindset of boys is changed, it will automatically lead to confidence in women because they will not be tread upon. There are many girls who come here (for checkup) and say that their brothers are not letting them study. A 22 years old girl said that my brother hits me and I am afraid of him. When I asked his age, he was only seven!"

She highlighted education as a mile stone in achieving empowerment – which she saw as increased confidence in women and equality. However, for this to happen, the socialization of men also needs to be catered to, as they are given power from a very young age, which is a disturbing phenomenon. Like in the anecdote shared by the doctor, the seven year old brother must not be reprimanded by his family when he hits his older sister. Socialization here is an extremely important point of analysis because several women saw achieving empowerment as being synonymous to being a good house wife and not causing trouble:

"Getting empowered depends on the woman herself because she should first and foremost, make her husband trust her that she is not doing anything wrong. *Zahir hai* (obviously) if a woman speaks in front of him and doesn't tell him before leaving the house, then there are issues. If she doesn't tell husband, he will be suspicious about where she goes and it will be her own fault." (Sadia, 42, housewife)

"I think if the woman listens to everyone politely, does what is asked of her and is talented enough to hide the bad things happening in her family, she achieves empowerment." (Maham, 45, Islamic teacher)

In the light of these opinions, empowerment achieved by being a good house wife is related to a woman getting permission from her husband to go outside and not causing trouble. For them, having power as a woman is fulfilling her role as a good wife and not asking for trouble. Even in one of the focus group discussions (FGD) I conducted, there was a unanimous agreement on the fact that empowerment could be achieved by being patient. The women laughed while discussing this and I could feel that they were making light of something that they felt they couldn't change. Some of the younger unmarried girls also had a very light-hearted view of how they perceive having power:

"Oh, I do know how to get the power. By crying, I get everyone, and especially by brothers, to listen to me." (Kinza, 20)
"Abba, bhai aur phir agay jaa k shohar ki minaten kar k he ba ikhtiar ho sakte hain, aur kia" meaning "By begging our father, brother and then husband, of course, how else can we be empowered?" (Tabassum, 22)

Underlying these light-hearted replies is the serious issue of how the females perceive getting power within their homes. If they require emotional blackmail for merely being listened to in their homes, it means that for them, empowerment is even just getting their way from those in power in their house – the men.

On the other hand, women who, by their own definition, are empowered, like one of those working within the development agency to bring the project itself to life, put the achievement of empowerment as being a power from within:

'I think that empowerment is instinctive; inside the person. If a person doesn't feel they need it, it can't happen. Once you get the feeling, you see that kind of environment around you and look for support. You need to feel, first. Only some people really listen to awareness sessions. I can't say that this person became empowered because of us, it was inside them and we nourished it." (Faiza, Aurat Foundation)

Judging from the difference in perspectives of the women in achieving empowerment – getting education, socialization, fulfilling responsibilities as a housewife and emotional blackmail as the processes identified by local women and women wanting it themselves being the first step to becoming empowered by the development expert – it seems as if the pathways to achieving empowerment also depend on the respective woman's realities and how they perceive they get or should get power. While the path outlined by the latter seems easy enough to proclaim, it may be difficult to 'feel' the need to be empowered in face of inhibiting factors. Also, majority of the local women see empowerment as a phenomena that happens via assistance, rather than being internal. The next section sheds light on these women's perceptions about external assistance as an aid to achieving empowerment, in the pretext of them being the beneficiaries of a project.

5.2.2 Is external assistance necessary?

Since Dhoke Khabba is an area where there is abundance of NGOs working for the welfare and empowerment of women, it was also significant to ask whether the women saw empowerment as coming from within or if it required assistance as a pre-condition, then what type did they believe had the tendency to empower. Majority of them disagreed with the fact that it can be achieved without any kind of help:

"No. You cannot do it by yourself. *Jab tak koi ungli na pakray tab tak sahara kese hoga?* (unless someone holds your finger, how will there be support?) You see, at times, the awareness helps. Other times, there needs to be financial assistance." (Nazreen, housewife)

"Women should be helped out financially so that we can pay the children's fees. I think financial help is better because *hamen zarurat he is cheez ki hai* (it is our need). I need to pay the fees for my children, and it's hard to get by without money." (Razia, housewife)

"No one can do it without assistance. It needs to be financial – it can't happen without money." (Rafia, housewife)

"No. *Bilkul bhi nahe* (not at all) until there isn't a support, then there will be no motivation. If there is financial help, only then women can get empowered. It is easy to say that I will stand beside the men with confidence. But without money, how are you going to compete with the man?" (Sumera, housewife)

These women prioritized financial external assistance as essential in the achievement of empowerment. As a support, a need to cover expenses, a motivation and as a resource for equal footing with men, they saw assistance as step towards achieving the power to solve their issues. While these required the money for themselves, others saw financial assistance as a good thing, but for their men, so that they had less to worry about:

"It is difficult without help. I work in houses as a maid and I am still worried because my husband can't find a job. We can't bear to see our children sleep hungry. I don't beg, I work for hours. I get 1500 per house but *himat nai hoti aur kaam karnay ki* (don't have the strength to do more) By the end of the month, there is no money. If someone helps us financially like getting my husband a cart (*rhehri lagana*) or money to open a grocery store, I would sleep in peace." (Azra, works as a maid)

"*Madad tou har kisi ko chahye hoti hai. Agar mere shohar ya baiton ko kahin se paisay mil jae ya kaam pe lag jae tou mujhe itni mehnat nai kerni paregi. Bas Allah wasila barha de*" meaning "Help is needed by everyone. If my husband or my sons get money or find work, then I won't have to work so hard. I hope God increases our source of income." (Faseeha, works as a maid)

These are the opinions of working women, who venture outside to earn but it is because they have no other choice. For them, external assistance would be a welcome solution to their monetary problems but for their husbands, not themselves. Poverty is the first and foremost issue faced in this instance; as working women, they are allowed to go out in public spaces but if given the choice, it is apparent that they would choose to stay home and let their husbands earn for them. Trying to empower these women by providing financial assistance would then be futile because their basic needs are not being met. It is also apparent that women have many different problems that they face daily. In this respect, others saw emotional support as a form of external assistance necessary for empowerment:

"A woman always needs help. She has many problems she hides. If one woman is doubtful, then the other can encourage her and talk to her, giving her confidence. Women can be a support to each other as well and be a support group." (Nusrat, housewife)

"We women are dependent. I feel women even need emotional support and assistance because they need someone to talk to, and lighten their hearts. Women come to me and sometimes even talk irrelevant things but I don't stop them because that would hurt them. They share a lot in that talk. If we focus on just one issue, then it becomes harder to think of a solution." (Laiba, local school principal)

Here, women's support for each other becomes a source of empowerment and providing each other with confidence because of their relationship. It provides a context for analysis where they need external assistance but don't require to go too far to get it – they find it with each other. This perspective to empowerment is in line with my own experience with the respondents, as once they started talking, they told anecdotes, complained in general and gossiped; straying away from the topic at hand. I could feel that they were happy about just having someone to talk to and lend an ear as emotional support.

Finally, the women working for the empowerment of these women were also of the view that empowerment is not possible without external assistance:

"You need external assistance but that will also only work if you are ready to help yourself. Women came to me for clothes but then asked me for grocery as well. They want us to give things to the whole of their household. They want the easy way out, without attempting to

work themselves. I learnt sewing myself, I learnt typing myself. Unless and until they are not willing to learn themselves, it is not possible." (Rahat, Ahsas Welfare Foundation)

"Empowerment is not possible without external assistance. Being a woman, I want to get higher education as well as a job but the institutions around me – like immediate family - are not supportive, then it will not be possible." (Noreen, Aurat Foundation)

They, being empowered women themselves, saw external assistance as not a requirement or a need like the local women, but rather as an aid to the internal desire of achieving empowerment. However, the difference between their perception and those of the local women fades in the light of the finding that all of these women see assistance as crucial to a woman becoming empowered – be in financial or emotional. Next, we now move to the short section on the local women's perception - those out of them who were beneficiaries - about the project aiming to provide assistance in the shape of mobilization and capacity building.

5.2.3 Aawaz and what it aims to achieve

Most of the women I interviewed in Dhoke Khabba knew about the existence of a non-governmental organization and their office in the vicinity but not about the specific project that was being implemented at the time. Some of these women also claimed that they had been a part of it at the start but not anymore (elaborated upon in the next chapter of the thesis) so those who felt they were knowledgeable enough to answer my questions about the project were those I encountered during the observed meetings conducted in the duration of my field work.

When I inquired from the Program Manager of the project why the project was named Aawaz, she shared:

"Because of voice and accountability. It was about raising voices and giving them a voice. We make them aware of their rights and then they speak up about them so that there is accountability by the government to take care of these social services. They become their own voice. They become empowered."

During one of the meetings, the CEO of Ahsas Welfare Foundation, Mr. Iqbal urged the women in these words: *"Sawal uthao. Awaaz uthao. Apne haq ki awaz bano. Malumaat ki awaz bano"* meaning "raise questions, raise your voices, become a voice for your right, become a voice of knowledge."

The reasoning is sound, keeping the project objectives in mind. The name itself is symbolic of raising a voice for political empowerment, both metaphorically and literally. When I inquired from the beneficiaries whether they knew what the project is about, and what they thought when they heard the name itself, their replies varied:

"We were already working with them (NGO) related to women's rights before so we knew that if it is named Aawaz, then it must mean raising a voice for the women." (Dilshaad, councillor UC 44)

"Aawaz basically means giving your opinion or saying something so it means giving your opinions in meetings." (Raila, student)

"It's for those women who don't have awareness, to tell them to speak for their rights and how to clean their environment and how to speak up against the violence on them in meetings." (Nazreen, housewife)

"Aawaz is an Agahi center where we come for meetings for solutions to the issues that we face in our areas." (Zainab, student)

"It is for women, because *aawaz unhe k lye uthai jaati hai* (voice is raised for them, obviously) and no one thinks about them." (Amir, student)

Most of these opinions were based on the women's prior experience with the organizations and knowing that it must be something to do with the rights of women and their awareness. Those who were less-informed associated it with meetings at the centre where they came to give their opinion. None of them associated it directly with the word empowerment nor with accountability, which is how the women would be politically empowered enough to cater to their own needs after the project ends – as per the project's goals.

5.3 Hindrances to achieving empowerment

While some women expressed their views on how empowerment can be achieved in trying to make me grasp their understanding of it, other respondents (a huge majority) expressed blatantly that it cannot be achieved by a woman. Again, they drew from their own experiences to tell me the issues that are faced by women if they wish to get empowered. In the first part of this section, I have looked at the issues as narrated by the women and in the second part, I have put forward the factors inhibiting empowerment as a contextual analysis, supported by verbatims.

5.3.1 Issues experienced

5.3.1.1 Permission issues

The women – young and old alike – highlighted not getting permission to do what they like, especially going out (mobility), as a major barrier to empowerment. To start with, this is either in the context of protecting the females from what is considered not a safe environment for them, or simply because the women are not trusted enough to be alone.

Shafqat, working in an NGO in the vicinity, shared an anecdote: "I think majority of us have the issue that family members don't let us get out of the house because of the *bura mahol* (bad atmosphere). Like my neighbor got a call that she got money from BISP (Benzair Income Support Programme) and to collect it. When she got to the place, they kidnapped her and stole her jewelry and *izzat bhi chori hogai* (honor was also stolen). This is why everyone is very suspicious."

Similarly, Zahida, a housewife, said begrudgingly: *"Mere shohar ne ye keh k chup kara dya k tumhe nai pata mulk k aaj kal k halat kese hain. Aurton k lye acha nai hai*" meaning "My husband silenced me by saying you don't know the circumstances of the country nowadays – it's not good for women."

Sara, a 40 year old Christian housewife stated:
"My husband suspects me a lot and doesn't even let me go to grocery store. He doesn't let me live separately from in-laws because he says I will cheat on him."

Other females, weighed down by responsibilities of the house, don't get permission to learn because then there would be no one else to take their place at home. An example of this was shared by the doctor in the local health center: "I got a case here who was 18 and was an orphan. She was studying and then her grandmother got sick so everyone said that you now have to look after her. She really wanted to learn so she tried to participate in trainings but when she asked for permission, her family refused, saying who will look after grandmother then? You can make as many centers if you want but if they (females) don't get permission, how can there be a difference?"

In one of the focus group discussions, another woman shared her experience with trying to do a job but her husband not allowing it because according to him, she wasn't able to juggle her household responsibilities at the same time:

"I think we should all agree that husbands don't give permission. I have gone through this. My husband said that how will you handle it especially since I have a disabled child at home, but I did teaching anyway. I used to teach, come back home, cook, look after the children and didn't even complain that I was exhausted but in the end, he strictly forbade me from going."

A daughter of one of the women I was interviewing exclaimed: "Why should mother want to do a job? If she isn't home, who will look after the house?"

Other young girls whom I interviewed also complained about the problems they face in their futile attempts in convincing their fathers or brothers to allow them to have jobs. For them, financial independence was a source of empowerment but it was hindered by not getting permissions.

"My brother said *kia tu nangi bhooki bethi hui hai?* (Are you sitting here naked or hungry?) If we are earning for you and giving you what you need, why do you want a job? They don't get that it's not just for money, it can be a desire as well." (Kinza, 20)

"I really wanted to do a job because I want to be confident. I have done matric, and when I talked to my father about it, he said as long as I am earning, you don't need a job so sit at home." (Fiza, 20)

As long as the basic needs of the women are being catered by the males, they don't find it necessary to allow their women to get jobs. For the males, job is a necessity in case of a financial need; not related to a woman's choice or her confidence or her experience. They consider it their responsibility and theirs alone – the work load has been divided by the norms of the society and men don't feel comfortable breaking the cultural code of conduct. They also don't appreciate a bad image of their family in front of the relatives and society, and many of them give this is a reasoning when not giving permission to women to work.

Nawaz Fatima, a 35 year old housewife said:
"He (husband) doesn't allow me. He says that our women don't work. Our relatives are very strict and says *tum log apne biwio ko sambhal nai sakte, hamare khandan mein aurten kabhi nai gai bahar* (you people cannot control your wives, women in our family don't go out) People talk. I want to work but he says that *kal mein kis kis ko jawab doon*ga (how will I answer everyone) If you work then how can I shut my brothers' mouth when they say that your wife has affairs?"

Noreen, working with Aurat Foundation, when telling about hindrances faced shared: "Women don't get permission, and even if husbands and brothers have allowed them, their extended family says that *ye kia kaam karne lag gai ho* (what is this work you have started doing) and pressurize through verbal harassment."

It therefore becomes a matter of protecting the honor of women when not giving them permission to go outside or have jobs. The protection of this honor is not only the responsibility of the males but also the females with power within the household as evident from this comment by Farzana bibi, a housewife who wanted to work:

"I don't get permission to go outside and neither do my daughters. Their father and grandmother are very strict in this matter."

To summarize, the women don't get permission to go outside, or do jobs to protect their honor in the unsafe environment of the public sphere; or because they are not trusted to be alone; or because providing the finances for the household is considered primarily a man's job; or because it would affect their responsibilities at home. The last of which women

themselves also consider to be an issue of significance but in the context of it becoming a hindrance in itself to their empowerment.

5.3.1.2 Household responsibilities and lack of support mechanism

Since a majority of the women I interviewed were married, the household responsibilities that come with being a wife and a mother were a major issue attributed as a hindrance, because of the lack of a support mechanism within their homes. Like a woman angrily retorted in one of the FDGs: *"Agar ghar walay he sath na dein tou kese stand le lein? Kese ba ikhtiar hon?"* meaning "If no one supports us at home, then how do we take a stand? How do we be empowered?"

One of the major responsibilities of these women is looking after their children. One of the beneficiaries of Aawaz, a mother of three children under the age of ten, complained:

"If I come to your office, then who will look after my children? I have to drop the children at schools at tuition, and then pick them while carrying my youngest child, who is two. Then, I have to give them lunch and dinner. By that time, my husband comes home. We can come 2 hours one day but then in few days we might not be able to because of guests or other issues. When at home, I can work in my free time, whenever it is."

For her, going out of the house to get the training or attending an awareness session was difficult because of her responsibility of looking after her children and their needs. Laiba, another beneficiary of the project and mother of three, said it along the same lines:

"My children don't take tuition; I help them myself. My husband says *that jo tum time de sakti ho, wo koi aur nai de sakta* (the time you can give, no one else can.) I told my husband to take over the responsibility of teaching Urdu to my son as mine is weak and his is strong. He agreed. And till now, my son's Urdu is weak. So the woman has to fulfill her responsibility in any case but men are not held accountable because it's not their job. If I ever say it, he says that if you saw I wasn't doing it, then why didn't you take over?"

A woman's children are her responsibility and hers alone, and if she isn't helped by her family from time to time, in order to attempt empowering herself, she isn't able to do it at all. This was clearly exemplified by the experience shared by Nawaz Fatima, mother of

two young children, when she tried to learn to sew but was not able to because of no support from home:

"If I work, there is no one to look after my children. I started going to a centre to learn sewing and told my *jithani* (husband's brother's wife) to look after my little girl as children were not allowed. My children are very young they don't go to school so they need looking after. On coming back, I used to find my child in soiled pamper since morning. *Jithani* said that you go to learn sewing but I am not your servant. I was in so much tension that I couldn't learn properly and then my fears did come true. My little girl got burnt from a hot water bucket *jithani* put on the floor. My husband said take care of your children yourself. Leave sewing. I left it because I didn't feel like going anymore either."

Due to the lack of support from her brother's wife, she quit trying what she perceived as her empowerment: learning a skill. Not only that, her maternal instinct allowed her to prioritize her love for her children and their safety, over her own desire to be empowered. Whilst I was interviewing her, she stated that she is now pregnant with her third child and defended herself without even a probe:
"*Bachay tou paida karnay hotay hain aurat ne. Is ko koi rok nai sakta"* meaning "a woman has to give birth – that cannot be stopped."

Having too many children itself can be seen as a natural hindrance to the process of empowerment perceived as getting a skill or training. Large number of children make it impossible for a woman to do her work properly. Large families create more cleaning and cooking, more mending and washing than small ones. (Jeffery, 1979) However, this is yet another aspect of their lives where they don't have power: decision of how many children to have. To elaborate, one of the older respondents, mother of 8 children, dejectedly stated: *"mard ko aurat se aur kia chahye hota hai? Bachay paida karna hamara kaam hai"* meaning "What else does a man want from women? Giving birth to children is our job."

Household responsibilities – especially looking after children in the absence of a support system – is seen as a major hindrance by the women. This also sheds light on their lack of power in decisions regarding birth control or the number of children and judging by the comment narrated above, also lack of awareness.

5.3.1.3 Domestic violence

With regard to decision making, women during an FGD unanimously agreed that they can't get power because the males resort to violence. According to them:

"We make the decisions with men together but sometimes we don't agree with them. *Phir marna shuru hojatay hain, ye faisla hai unka* (then they start hitting us, that's their decision) what can we say to them then? *Bachon ki khatir chup hona parta hai* (have to stay quiet for the sake of children)

Another woman, Razia, told during her interview:

"Whenever my husband is being unfair, I reply and defend myself but he gets very angry and then he hits me. Was I not supposed to speak up at all?"

Domestic violence can be then seen as a hindrance to women raising a voice or taking part in decision making within the household as a source of gaining power when they try to speak up. In other instances, having experienced it as a consequence of raising their voice, some women have stopped trying altogether. This is exemplified below in a tirade of a woman (who used to be a beneficiary of the project) in her own words:

"*Apne aap k lye bolne bhi jaenge tou nai bol saktay. Log kehte hain awaaz apne lye uthao, haq k lye bolna chahta hai insaan but agar mein awaaz uthaungi bhi na tou mujhe mar k dabba denge. Mera shohar drink karta hai, saas susar kehte hain mein ghalat hoon. Badalna bhi chahoon tou nai badal sakti kuch. Apni baat manana bhi chahungi tou kuch nai ker sakti. Awaz na niklay bas meri. Dusron ki nazar mein buri mein banti hoon k ye bolti kyun hai apne shohar k samne. Bolun tou mein buri, na bolun tou mein buri. Mene apnay bachay apni behn ko de dye hain takay wo meray upper zulm na dekhen. Mein aur kia karun? Mujhe talaq nai chahye. Mujhe izzat chahye, isi ghar mein"* (Even if I want to speak up for myself, I can't. People say that that raise your voice and for your right and a person may want to but if I raise my voice, I will be pressed down through violence. My husband drinks and they (in-laws and husband) tell me that I am wrong. Even if I want to change something, I can't. I can't make anyone listen to me. I can't raise my voice. People judge me and say that if she hadn't raised her voice, this wouldn't have happened. If I speak, then I am bad, if I don't, then I'm bad. I have given my children to

my sister so they don't see me hurt, what else can I do? I don't want divorce, I want respect in this house.")

By the end, she burst into tears. While I felt extremely sorry for her, and felt bad about making her cry, her emotional state showed her helplessness and the intensity of her words. She used the words 'I cannot raise a voice' herself when saying that her voice is made silent through domestic violence. This, coming from a beneficiary of a project which aims to mobilize the women to raise their voices, and especially against violence (under output 2) it is a major barrier to the empowerment process. I was accompanied by the resource person when conducting this interview and she told the woman that they would help her get divorce, but she vehemently rejected the idea, saying that no organization can help me. Not only does this display the powerlessness of the woman in a patriarchal society, but it also sheds light on how empowering women is not as easy as it seems. In addition, it is vital to observe that her mother-in-law acted as an aid in this situation, rather than berating her son, which might be expected of her, being a woman herself.

5.3.1.4 Women as barriers

In addition to not acting a support system in case of household responsibilities and as an accomplice to domestic violence, some other respondents saw women acting as barriers to empowerment in different ways.

During one of the informal discussions in office, one of the older, married women working in the organization gave her opinion on the matter:

"Do you know who is to blame for men's behaviors? Mothers. Men nowadays don't even get up to drink glasses of water by themselves and it's because of the coddling done by women."

While this opinion was aimed at how women socialized their children, especially sons, others aimed their criticism at the nature of women to ask for trouble and the tendency to bring other women down.

“They say nice things in front of your face but then do backbiting. When their husbands get home from a long day at work, all they do is complain. Then the men yell at women because they are like walls, they don’t listen.” (Maham, Islamic teacher)

“I don’t let my daughter do a job because she doesn’t know what trouble her brother’s wives can do. They say that she shouldn’t study because she doesn’t do housework. If she goes out, they will blame her about something else and make her life miserable.” (Rukhshanda, widowed, 65)

“I stitch clothes at home and the women bargain with me, bringing it down to 250 rupees but these same women give tailors till 800 rupees for same clothes.” (Nazreen, seamstress)

Therefore, while these were general opinions provided by women in different walks of life on how women make their own life miserable by being petty, how they are an indirect threat to getting a job and take advantage, it is important to note that these women quoted examples on how other females make life difficult keeping their perspectives within the private sphere i.e. inside their homes. It is also a point of analysis showing how one woman’s power is ‘power taken from’ another woman.

5.3.1.5 Lack of education

As highlighted from literature review in studies conducted in Pakistan, (Haq et al., 2016, Noreen & Khalid, 2012) education is a major determinant in empowerment. Findings from this research are also similar as some women highlighted their own lack of education as a hindrance to them being empowered because for working women, it meant that they couldn’t get high paying jobs, and for housewives, it meant that they couldn’t be entrusted with the power of decision making due to their lack of awareness or not allowed to go outside because they wouldn’t know how to protect themselves from harm.

“Mein panchwi pass hoon. Mujhe gharon mein kaam karne k ilawa kahin aur koi kyun rakhay ga?” meaning “I have only studied till 5th grade. Why would someone give me a job other than working in people’s houses?” (Azra, housemaid)

“Mene parha nai. Ab pata chalta hai, apni ghalti ki saza bhugat rahi hoon, ghar k kisi kaam mein meri raye nai li jaati” meaning “I didn’t study. Now I realize because I am

being punished for that mistake as no one asks for my opinion in any of the household matters." (Bano bibi, housewife)

"My husband says that you are illiterate and not smart so I worry that someone might take you somewhere or you might come to harm. He doesn't even let me stand at the door or go grocery shopping." (Nusrat, housewife)

In the face of women themselves sharing their realization of the consequences of their lack of education, literacy can be seen as an encouraging factor in women's empowerment because it would lead to awareness, knowledge and expertise which translate into a position of power for the women whether it is in private or public sphere. Put in a similar way by Malik and Courtney (2011), women who are educated are more likely to be listened to; their views are increasingly respected, which means they are able to contribute to the society.

5.3.2 Inhibiting contextual factors

Some of the hindrances were deduced from the analysis of the perceptions and opinions shared by the women; which, while being detrimental to the empowerment processes themselves, also serve as a context for the existence of some of the issues already discussed as well as the women's perceptions on empowerment. I have used the themes resulting from analysis to divide the section accordingly.

5.3.2.1 Protection of honor and respect

In defining what respect of a woman means to them, the respondents gave their opinion on why a woman shouldn't leave the confines of her home, where her honor is protected.

From her experience, Rukhshanda, a 65 year old widow shared:
"When I became a widow, I did stitching at my home and never even got out of the house. Whatever money we earned, we did it sitting at home. I didn't go out because of my brothers who then talk. My daughters are an example for the rest of the street who didn't go out of the house and did all the sewing and washing at home."

She saw staying at home and not venturing outside as a matter of pride and in setting an example for the rest of the people, even when she didn't have a support in the form of her

husband. Earning from home as opposed to going out to do a job is considered the 'right thing to do'. This is mainly because of how people talk about the woman if she does, which sheds a bad light on the woman's honor.

"A lot of people think that she is not a good woman if she does a job because she goes outside her house. If her husband earns, then why does she need it? People talk. Even if we change our mindset, other people won't and then it's difficult for women." (Fiza, student)

"Relatives criticize. Boys are allowed to go out even when they are wrong but girls are not even allowed to go out in case they become spoilt and what other people will think about the family." (Amir, student)

"If a woman goes outside the house, *uske ghar walay ya janay walay koi aisi baat ker denge jis se wo ghalat lagegi* (her relatives or people she knows will say something that will make her seem wrong) Even if she is right in her place, *usko ghalat sabit kerne k lye koi bhi issue bana denge* (any issue will be created to prove her wrong) Actually our society is like this… they look at every woman with *buri nazar* (bad intentions)" (Jamshed, local business man)

This was one of the seldom topics that the men offered their opinion on readily (as opposed to being silent and awkward when interacting with me) According to the opinions shared, women in public sphere become the objects of criticism and put theirs and their family's honor at risk by allowing the people to talk about her in a negative manner. In order to make the visit 'acceptable' they can go out in groups, attempt to cover themselves and always ask for permission from her family:

"I think that if women go together as a group, then it is better instead of going alone because then we feel that *chalo koi tou hai sath* (at least someone is with them)" (Chaudhry Haider, local business man)

"A woman should ask for her husband, mother and brother's permission. *Ijazat hui tou unki izzat hai. Agar wo ijazat k bagher bahar gai tou log baten banaenge k iski sharam haya khatam hogai hai* (If they have permission, then they have respect. If she goes out

without permission, then people will say that she doesn't have any shame or decency." (Nusrat, housewife)

Here, seeking permission is seen as synonymous with maintenance of woman's respect. Therefore, permission as a hindrance is rooted in protecting the woman's honor. This is especially true for unmarried Muslim women, for whom it is unacceptable to be seen outside frequently. The fear of what people will say and damaging rumors is real. The woman who goes out often is also presumed to be neglecting her domestic duties; considered shameless. (Jeffery, 1979) In the same way, some respondents saw it as being rooted in the woman's behavior in the domestic sphere:

"A woman's honor is in how she deals with her household issues, how she conducts herself… listening to everyone politely and hiding the ugly truths of the home" (Tahira, housewife)

"Aurat ki izzat isme hai k wo khawand ki izzat karegi tou uski izzat hogi. Bachon ki jese izzat karegi wesa wo uski izzat karenge. Wo khud masla create keregi tou lazmi baat hai koi izzat nai hogi" meaning "Her respect is in her respecting her husband, how she respects her children, then they will respect her the same way. If she creates issues herself, then obviously there will be no respect." (Muhammad Ashraf, Zakat Committee Head, UC 44)

A woman's respect is in staying at home, to protect her honor and even within her home, it is dependent on her fulfilling her responsibilities and conducting herself the right way. While dominantly, honor and respect were seen to be associated with a woman's mobility and her conduct, there were some opinions which used the hindrances to empowerment with respect inter-changeably. In a FGD, on the mention of a woman's respect, the women immediately complained that it didn't exist and it wasn't possible:

"Kisi cheez mein bhi aurat ki izzat nai hai kyun k aurat ko dabba k rakha jaata hai. Mard aurton pe apna haq jataty hain, zulm kartay hain" meaning "There is no respect for women because they are pushed down. Men misuse their rights and are cruel."

"Woman doesn't have respect. Not in home, not outside. My mother in law doesn't respect me, nor does my husband and how can I demand respect from strangers? Either way, I have no respect." (Faseeha bibi, house maid)

In addition to protection of honor and maintenance of respect being the context for permission issues faced by the women in trying to increase mobility and attempt to get jobs, the existence of respect and honor is also seen as a pre-condition for achieving power within the household because in its absence, the women feel their rights are usurped.

5.3.2.2 Patriarchy: men have the power

With regard to empowerment of women, it was important to discover how much power they possessed as opposed to the men. From the analysis of data on decision making, control over finances and women's own perception of men's power being a hindrance, it was apparent that deep-rooted patriarchal norms didn't allow for an empowering atmosphere. Respondents shared that the males in the house made all the main decisions:

"He makes all the main decisions, from financial to what to have for dinner, even my nose pin to hair dye are according to his choice." (Zehra, housewife)

"My husband makes all the major decisions. He tells me, doesn't ask me." (Nusrat, housewife)

"The owner of the house should make the decisions. In my house, my father does it. I think that he would want that he make the decisions in the house because he pays for everything. *Ladies se kam he pucha jata hai. Aur agar unki baat ghalat ho tou bata dete hain aap ghalat ho*. (Ladies are seldom asked and if they are wrong, they are told that they are wrong.)" (Sajjad, student)

From the reasoning put forth by the young male respondent, the owner and the breadwinner of the house maintains the right for making decisions in the house. This means that while the man is in control of the finances, he has the power over the women in terms of decision making; making this a major hindrance to a woman raising her voice or having power in the household. A woman exclaimed during a FGD:

"Dekhen, ye baat man'ne wali hai k mard ki ijaardaari majod hai, ham jitni marzi baten kar lein. Jab tak paisa hamare hath mein nai ayega, ham baten her ker sakte hain" meaning "Look, we all accept that men control everything, however much we talk. Unless and until the money doesn't come in our control, we can do just that – talk."

I was taken aback by her brutal honesty in front of a group of women, but they all nodded and agreed with her. Others, during their interviews, shared the same experiences:

Rafia, wife to a Rickshaw driver, stated:

"Whatever the husband earns, it is in the end, his money, not ours. This means that he controls where and how to spend it."

Sara, wife to a taxi driver, confided:

"He says that he earns the money and I don't have any right over it so I shouldn't say anything about where I spend it. Nor do I have any right to say anything over where he goes or does. I can't say or do anything. I don't have father or brother so where will I go, even if he doesn't listen to me?"

While men have control of the finances, women don't feel that they can have power over anything else and while men are the major earners, they will own the money that they earn. However, with the power that comes with being the breadwinner, they also have the power to forbid their women from going outside i.e. earning through a job. It is a vicious cycle promoted by patriarchy where the women are not only dependent on men but rely on their position in the society for their own security like stated by the woman above – if she leaves her husband, she has no brother or father to turn to for support. Interestingly, even the men who don't work enjoy a position of power in the household.

Farzana bibi, who works in people's houses, shared:

"My husband makes all the decisions. He doesn't work but he is *khud he ba ikhtiar hamare ghar mein kyun k hamare masheray ka nizam he aisa hai* (automatically empowered in the house because that is how our society works)"

Shaista, whose husband is confined to bed with a broken leg for several years, stated: "My husband is in charge. Whatever he says is *pathar pe lakeer* (set in stone)"

Even the men who are not physically present, maintain their power:

"My husband is in Dubai at the moment but he obviously calls and keeps control like he asked my son yesterday that why did you come home late and didn't allow my daughter to go out just today. He also makes all the main decisions." (Sharmeen, housewife)

In the absence of husband and presence of older sons, they have the power:

"The woman who stays at home can't do anything with her own will. Whatever my sons say that happens in our house. They are in-charge." (Fouzia, a widow)

So whether the men are earning or even physically present or not, they have the power within the household. This ownership of power automatically transfers to the eldest male, or any male in the house. This is the advantage men face whilst living in a patriarchal society – they have the power by default. When they see this power being threatened, they put barriers by either abusing their power through domestic abuse, or merely not allowing the women to leave the domestic sphere, where they have control over them. In addition, women usurp other women's power wherever possible, which leads to them hindering other women's empowerment.

5.3.2.3 Socialization – gendered roles

Pakistani society being highly patriarchal also gives rise to and is attributed by the age old traditions of a subservient and subordinate role of women (Chaudhry et al., 2012) and Dhoke Khabba is not an exception. The preset differences in the approach of the roles and capabilities of males and females is instilled through socialization in the society, with the general impression that females are the weaker gender, reinforced through their own personal experiences as they grow up. (Shabib-ul-Hasan & Mustafa, 2012) The respondents, when sharing their perceptions and experiences, painted empowerment of women as not being 'culturally' acceptable because of the role of woman in their society as opposed to a man.

The women came to a mutual agreement in a focus group discussion that women are told from the beginning that they can't do certain things like if she works, or goes outside, it is not considered right. When inquired about who tells them this, first they declared it was the '*maashra* i.e. culture' and then added that their family members say it; their mother and sister in-laws doing it as a support to the men in the family. By the end of the discussion, one of the woman jokingly said to me: *"lagta hai aap ghar mein larayan karwaengi"* meaning "it seems as you will make fights happen at home" upon which, everyone laughed.

While the statement was made light heartedly, it signified that in asking questions, I was uncovering dust from deep seated norms that inspite of being unfair, are not vocalized by the women because it would lead to fights i.e. disturbance of peace. In order to avoid fights, the first and foremost requirement from a woman is compromise, which the respondents firmly believed that a woman should do because it is one of her responsibilities to do so, for the sake of her children, marriage and honor.

Yasmeen, a grandmother with two sons and a grandson, shared her opinion:

"Women are supposed to compromise with their husband but they don't. This new generation wants to be in control. A woman's second name is *samjhota* (compromise). Whenever there is a fight, the woman is supposed to compromise. I tell my daughter-in-law that you need to think about your child when stirring up trouble."

Similarly, the following comment from a woman – with daughters aged ten and sixteen – is typical:

"The first and foremost thing is the relation between a husband and a wife, *rishtay ko le ker chalna aurat k hathon mein hai* (looking after relations is in the hands of the woman) She has to take two families along – her own and her husband's. Woman doesn't have time to be empowered like do a job because her other responsibilities are more important."

The gendered role of a woman is first and foremost, a wife, a mother and keeping the relations within the household in-tact, more than anything else. This is a largely shared belief among the respondents that they have a choice between either being empowered or fulfilling their responsibilities as a woman. Amongst which, they choose the latter. These

beliefs – coming from a grandmother and mother – are then instilled into the next generation of women, through socialization, because older women are more experienced and their wisdom shouldn't be ignored.

Nazreen, mother of two daughters (one of whom is married), stated: *"Hamen apni betion ko batana chahye k zaruri nai zindagi apni tajarbay mein guzar dein, baron ki danai bhi koi cheez hai. Tajarbay karne se zindagi ujar sakti hai. Unko baron ki izzat karna sikhae aur agar dabbay bhi tou tareeqe se, samjhota karay"* meaning "We should tell our daughters that it's not necessary that they spend their lives experimenting, wisdom of elders is important. Lives can be ruined from mere experiences. They should be taught to respect elders and if they are pushed down, they should allow it to be done tactfully and compromise."

According to the wisdom drawn from experience of the older women, instead of raising a voice against oppression, they should handle this oppression tactfully by compromising because former would cause problems in the household that would then be attributed to the woman. Keeping these responses it mind, it is evident that the socialization into the gendered roles of a woman being a subservient housewife shouldn't just be attributed to the males, the women play an equal part in promoting it. Resulting from this socialization are the views shared by several respondents where they firmly believed that a woman's domain is her home, with less interactions with the outside world.

"A woman's main role is in sitting at her own home, in peace." (Farzana, 33)

"I like to stay home. I don't think I need to go outside. *Shuru se adat ye hai that darwaze k samne gari khari hoti thi, idhar udhar bhi nai dekhna tou phir bas wohe adat hai ab* (It's the habit from the beginning that the car comes right to the door and to not even look around, so it's the same habit now.)"(Fizza, 20)

"I think that a woman shouldn't go outside the house. When a woman goes out of the house, *ghar ka nizam badal jaata hai* (the household system changes) She is not able to focus on her responsibilities at home, to her children. *Ghar ka kaam sirf aurat he karti hai, mard nai karega* (Household work is done by the woman, a man never will) And the attention a woman can give to her children, a father never can." (Shaista, 42)

Be it young or old, the women have internalized the idea that their place is inside the home, and in their opinion, the 'pre-condition' for empowerment i.e. going outside the house is tinged with negativity. Not only are the younger girls socialized like that from the beginning, so that they are psychologically inclined to stay at home, but the role of a woman as looking after her children at home being her first and foremost duty should be taken seriously, as it might be affected by her 'attempt at empowerment' by going outside. In addition, this process of socialization also delegates the role of earning to the man. The conclusion reached at one of the focus group discussions was that whatever the conditions, earning is the responsibility of the husband or the males in the family. This was reinforced by the few interviews I managed to conduct with males:

"Aurton ko paison k maslon mein pareshan honay ki zarurat nai hai, ye mard ka kaam hai" meaning "Women need not worry themselves about financial matters, that is the job of a man." (Chaudhry Haider, local business man)

Another man was of the view that a woman was restricted by her weak physicality in trying to do everything a man can:

"Now that is a *rwayati baat* (traditional saying) – to believe that a woman can do everything. A woman can work only according to the *mashray ki riwayat* (traditions of her culture) like can she sell chicken at the poultry shop? No, because that requires a lot of strength and women are *nazuk* (petite)" (Iqbal, working in an NGO)

Yet another shared his practice of abiding by the societal norms of not interacting with the opposite sex in public, be it his wife:

"This is my third year of marriage and I think I have only gone outside in the area with her (wife) 2 or 3 times. Once, I went to market and once to hospital. I think *acha nai lagta* (it's not appropriate) When I went out with her, I was walking far ahead of her because I felt awkward." (Jamshed, local business man)

The distribution of roles, responsibilities and spheres in which both genders operate is cemented by the socialization of the males and females from a young age. It then becomes a cycle where this 'wisdom' is passed by women from one generation to the next; women

are inclined to favor their responsibilities and follow the right code of conduct 'being a woman'. This also serves as a context in hindering the empowerment of women via not allowing them to get education because of her prioritized role as a wife and mother and the burden of household responsibilities highlighted by the women themselves.

5.3.2.4 Religion

When talking about socialization as an inhibiting contextual factor as an analysis, it also appeared that many of the respondents explained the roles of men and women being defined within the parameters of Islam. They justified the socialization into these roles, as well as lack of need for a woman to be empowered through Islamic teachings, though none of them quoted exact verses from the Holy Quran. If the women try to empower themselves in terms of seeking employment, it should be done within the limitations imposed on her by Islam.

"A woman's honor is in *parda* (cover). If she goes outside, she should cover herself fully and when searching for a job, should apply for a respectable job like teaching or being a nurse." (Nusrat, housewife)

"Religion tells woman to cover themselves while men can take off their shirts and work in the vest. You tell me, how can a woman be equal to a man?" (Iqbal, Ahsas Welfare Foundation)

Interestingly, this view was shared by a man who was part of the development team putting Aawaz into action. While a woman's honor was seen to be associated with her covering herself as instructed by her religion, it was also seen as a hindrance when working in the public sphere; implying that a woman cannot do it whilst being restricted. A similar view was shared by women who put forward a religious justification of a woman's nature and position in Islam being why the women shouldn't try to be empowered through work.

"*Allah says aurat naqusul aqal hai* (women have less intelligence) so even when she is empowered, she won't use her brains. She will think that she is earning so the man is lower than her. *Ghar wohe acha hota hai jahan mard ba ikhtiar ho.* (That house is the best where only the man is empowered)" (Saba, housewife)

"When a woman starts doing a job and considers herself equal to a man, she starts to think that she is very powerful. But a woman's place according to our religion is not that. Even in fights at home, she will talk back too much and a man never wants that a woman talk back to him. Her feeling of power creates a problem." (Rukhshanda, housewife)

"Islam says that women should stay at home and men go outside. A woman should stay at home to protect her honor." (Anila, student)

From her being created as less intelligent than man to a woman's place being that of powerlessness, not raising her voice to staying at home, the women confidently assured me that empowerment was something that was not well-suited to a woman's disposition within Islam. In addition to these religious perspectives being a direct inhibition to the process of empowerment, religion also placed an indirect role in keeping the women complacent whilst being dependent on Allah to solve their problems and explaining away their troubles without an attempt to resolve them by trying to get a job or raising a voice.

"Bas jis haal mein Allah rakhay, rehna hota hai. Allah meri mushkil hal karega, agar usne chaha" meaning "We have to live with the circumstances God has kept us in. He will solve my problems if he wishes." (Zubaida, housewife)

"Ye sab Allah ka kaam hai. Hona na hona. Har baat insan k bas mein nahe hoti. Kuch baton pe insan ka zor nai hota. Agar kaam bhi karo tou agar wo chahay koi farq nai parega" meaning "It's all God's work. If it happens or not. It's not all in the hands of a human. Even if you work, if God wants, it won't make a difference." (Shaista, housewife)

Not only are the women depending in religion for psychological comfort, as He is the one who put her in these trying circumstances and He is the one who will solve the problems, they also justify not getting a job (as a way to empower themselves) through the power He has over them. It is not the Islamic values themselves but their corruption and lack of understanding on proper Islamic knowledge which is the reason behind lack of women's empowerment. (Chaudhry et al., 2012) Religion here creates a context within which their perception of empowerment is affected by their understanding of the teachings, or how they have been socialized into them, which might have been done the wrong way but which is beyond the scope of this research.

5.4 The possibility of empowerment

The hindrances and inhibiting contextual factors outlined in the previous section set a precedent for the general perception of women's empowerment by the respondents, when they answered the question of what empowerment means to them not by definition or how it is brought about but rather, the possibility of its achievement (different from when they shared how it is achieved exhibited in the section 5.2) set in ground realities.

From their experience of living in a patriarchal society with multiple factors directly and indirectly affecting how they perceive power, many of the respondents declared outright that a woman cannot be empowered. One woman, a beneficiary of Aawaz and a housewife, gave her reasoning arising from socialization and the restricted position of a woman in the society:

"No, I don't think my empowerment is possible. I don't even have control over the remote! On a serious note, our system don't let us excel. *Hamare zehn mein daal dya jaata hai, tum aurat ho. Ab uske sath kuch restrictions hain jo torna hamare lye bohat mushkil hota hai* (it is put in our minds that you are a woman, and the restrictions that come with it are difficult to break)"

While her opinion started off with a comparison jokingly made on a woman's power within the home, she went on to make a significant statement on why empowerment for a woman was not possible; because of the restrictions placed on her. Another respondent, this one a housewife as well as a breadwinner for her family as a maid, saw the weight of responsibilities making empowerment impossible.

"Ye bhi karay wo bhi karay, kia kia karay aurat? Zindagi ghar ki zimedarian utha utha k guzar jaegi, ba ikhtiar kahan hona hai. Ba ikhtiari unke lye hai jinki zimedari nai hoti, ham bas yehi logon k kaam karte aur ghar ki zimedarian utha ker budhay hojaenge" meaning "Do this, do that, what should I woman do? Life will be spent looking after responsibilities at home, how to be empowered? Empowerment is for those who have no responsibilities. We will grow old doing other people's work and dealing with our responsibilities."

Drawing from the realities of her own life, she envisioned empowerment as something that one does when they don't have any responsibilities, and since every woman has to take care of either the responsibilities of the house or earning, or both (in this case), she cannot get empowered. Then, there were those who saw the environment of the society as not being encouraging to the empowerment of a woman:

"No, we can't get empowered. We don't get permission and you know about the environment. If we are out on the street and boys tease us, or snatch our purse, or worse, what can we do? Women are helpless." (Sawera, 25)

"Nai ikhtair aurat k paas nai ho sakta kyun k usko tanqeed ka nishana foruun banaya jata hai, hamara mahol aisa hai. Har banda achi nazar se nai dekhta. Izzat pe baat ajati hai" meaning "No, women can't have power because she is taunted immediately as our environment is like this. Not every person has good intentions. It has an effect on her respect (honor)" (Muhammad Ashraf, local business man)

The society is such that women have to protect their honor by staying home and thus being able to be empowered (through mobility – in their opinion) While the fathers and brothers don't allow the women to go out or act of their own free will, after marriage, this power over her life is transferred to the husband. This never-ending cycle of the powerlessness of a woman was shared by Yasmeen, a housewife:

"Women can never be empowered. They spend their lives trying. A mother raises her daughter because she has to get married and go to another house one day, so her parents' house is not hers. Then she signs and goes to husband's house. Mother-in-law says that it is my house, not yours. She has children and for them, stays silent. When the children grow up, they have their own wives who say that this is our house, not your mother's and complain about her. You tell me, which one is the woman's home? She dies and goes to the grave and I guess after a few months even that would be taken away from her for another body."

This woman's tirade is significant in showing that within the private sphere, in whichever phase of her life a woman attempts to have power, she faces resistance. However, even in this scenario, there are other women who have power (like the mother-in-law or daughter-

in-law) and it is a matter of fighting for that power in the home from each other while the men of the house enjoy a position of power over the women by default, due to their gender. Another respondent declared that empowerment is not possible through religious justification:

"A woman cannot be empowered because our religion doesn't allow it. Allah says in the Quran that *mene mard ko aurat pe bartari de di* (I have given man excellence over woman) And when Allah has said it, then what can women do? *Jahan aurat ba ikhtiar hojati hai wahan nizam kharab hojata hai* (where a woman becomes empowered, the system collapses) She enters a culture where there are men. This is where the problem begins. A man is a man. He is superior to a woman in every way." (Saba, housewife)

As already discussed in religion playing an inhibiting role in the empowerment of women, it is the firm belief of many women that men are made superior to them and that gives them the right to the power they hold over women. In a way, they believe that they don't deserve to be empowered because their religion has endorsed it and they cannot go against it – whether it is an attempt at individual empowerment or power over man in the household. Now, since males have cultural and religious power – as an analysis of the data – they control the avenues to a woman's empowerment and a majority of the respondents saw this as the reason why women cannot be empowered.

"Even if you empower me, I don't have any place else to live other than here, under the hold of my husband. Women are dependent. They have families and responsibilities. So I cannot be empowered without my husband's permission." (Sofia, a Christian housewife)

"Even if they (women) think they are empowered, they are not empowered. In the end, it's the men's world women live in." (Farzana, housewife)

Even in all of the FGDs conducted, in the end, the women reached the consensus: "*Jeet tou phir hamesha mard ki he hoti hai, wo apni he kartay hain"* meaning "a man always wins in the end, they do what they want."

While these were the responses that were focused on how the hindrances, realities of women's lives, religion and man's usurpation of power doesn't allow empowerment of

women, there were some that believed in the possibility of women's empowerment albeit in a manner of their own perception. A few of the men I interviewed were of the belief that women do have power in the society:

"Yes, they are empowered. They can take decisions on their own, like my mother, who doesn't allow me to stay out late. She has the power until my father comes home." (Sajjad, student)

"Yes, they have power, like at the bank, there are separate lines for them and they are called first. Even in this office, we give first priority to women and their work be done first." (Jameel, working at the union council office)

The two perspectives coming from males are typical comments that one generally hears about women being in power, where it is evident that men give examples that they experience themselves, where they feel that women are either unfairly prioritized or have the power over them in their roles as mothers or as an elder. Other men that I conversationally interviewed about their perception of empowerment reacted with silence or saying that you would know better, as you are a woman, not us.

Women who looked at the possibility of empowerment in a positive light, felt that they were already empowered within their homes. Two of the women (housewives) that I conversationally interviewed together, shared:

"We can do whatever we want at home. Our husbands put their earnings in our hands and then we can spend it whatever way we want, even going grocery shopping. They even say that you can cook whatever you want. If you talk about empowerment, then we are empowered at home. Our husbands are at work all day but we do take permission from them at certain times. We don't need more than that."

Another respondent, an aged mother and housewife remarked:

"Yes, it is possible as I solve all my problems on my own. My husband goes early at 7 in the morning and sometimes comes after midnight. I call him and tell him from something

breaking at home to the motor malfunctioning. I have the *ikhtiar* (power) over these small decisions but I tell him about them."

"I think my empowerment is *kuch bhai aur baba ki baat man'na, kuch apni manwana* (listening to my father and brother in some things, and making them listen to some of mine) at home. I do have the power." (Fiza, student)

These females have control over the finances and have some mobility. For them, asking for permissions is a small price to pay for the rest of the power they have. The perception of power they yield here is linked to having it in some areas but being satisfied with the males having it in other areas. This satisfaction also extends to some women being happy the way they are, and perceiving empowerment as an unnecessary improvement in their lives. According to them, it may be important, but it is not something that should be enforced as a necessity.

"It is important but when I am spending time at home with my children, I am happy this way. If I know how to sew, then my husband wouldn't have an issue with me staying home and doing it but he doesn't like it if I go outside. Women sometimes think that they should do something when they are tired of having issues at home. But they shouldn't run away from their problems. I try to adjust in less money when my husband makes less money." (Shaista, housewife)

"Mujhe ab sab kuch mil raha hai, jo zubaan se nikalti hoon le dete hain tou mujhe kia zarurat hai ba ikhtiari ki" meaning "If I am getting everything at home, whatever I say, my husband brings for me, then why would I need to be empowered?" (Rukhshanda, housewife)

These women are happy the way they are; empowerment remains a foreign concept to them – may be important, but not related to them because their needs are being fulfilled by the men and they are content with their household responsibilities.

Women in another house that I went to – mother and two daughters in their twenties – answered along the same lines, saying that they are very happy the way they are living; they never go outside but don't feel the need to. It was apparent that they lived a very

sheltered life and were comfortable with it. When I was talking to them, my questions were met by silence and their mother became the spokesperson for the two of them. This happened more often than I can recount. Several other respondents impressed upon me that they were happy with their lives and didn't 'need' empowerment because they didn't feel the need to go out.

"You know, I am happy with my life and don't even want to go outside to be empowered. Sometimes, I go to the market with my mother but have never been alone." (Anila, student)

"Where there is love and trust in a family, then a woman doesn't even need to go out for any sort of activity to be empowered." (Saba, housewife)

Empowerment was increasingly associated with mobility or 'going out' or getting a job, when the women talked about their own lives as opposed to when they told definitions and their opinions on how a woman should be empowered. It is apparent that their perceptions on the possibility of empowerment actually taking place or existing are mostly negative and taken as a process that only takes place when a woman is not happy with her life.

5.5 Discussion and Analysis

As can be seen from the extensive nature of the findings, the perceptions of women in Dhoke Khabba about empowerment are far from simple. From their opinion on what it means, to how it can be achieved to the hindrances they identified to the possibility of their empowerment in the face of these inhibitions, there emerged a wide range of perspectives on the subject. However, there were some cross cutting themes that emerged which are significant to sketching a picture of the meanings attached to empowerment by women whilst they interacted with the NGOs through the platform of Aawaz.

There exist a range of empowerment experiences; no two individuals or groups have the exact same experience or context but are able to relate to different elements of a mixed bag of experiences. (Jupp & Ali, 2010) The same can be said for the perceptions of empowerment expressed by the respondents residing in Dhoke Khabba – each had a different meaning attached to the concept. Accordingly, there were two pathways to these perceptions; one, arising from a woman's respective position in the society, and second,

emerging as a result of the hindrances and inhibiting factors giving rise to these hindrances.

5.5.1 Understanding of empowerment

5.5.1.1 Arising from women's position

Analysis of the data revealed that the perceptions of the local women's empowerment were shaped by their age, employment, financial status, marital status, religious beliefs and above all, lived experiences which shaped their respective perspectives on possible achievement.

Working women like teachers, doctors and councillors defined empowerment as raising voice, standing up for rights, to be achieved through socialization and education of both genders.

Younger females defined it as freedom to live the way they want and making their own choices in life, and in their experience, can be achieved through emotional blackmail to get their way, if at all. Housewives and mothers defined it in terms of handling finances, having a say in decision making and being independent and from experience, saw it as being achieved by being a good wife, not causing trouble and following the religious parameters, so that they are considered responsible, trust worthy and honorable.

Since a majority of the respondents either young or married and running households, the latter was the dominant perception of empowerment defined. In this respect, the women found their power 'resided within' and 'as a result of' their actions. It is important to note that while the working women drew from their awareness of what it means to be empowered in public sphere, these women whose lives were spent in private sphere – having found it more difficult to put into words - told what they thought from their own experiences, giving honest opinions that shed light on their difficulties as well. From analysis of their perceptions on empowerment and its possibility, however, it can be deduced that power can be derived from sources other than mobility and awareness about rights. For the women in domestic spheres, they obtained power from their positions of authority within the family, their age and relations with husbands.

The perspectives differed with the realities of their lives. There was a difference between the perceptions of those who had children, and those who didn't; while most saw children as part of household responsibilities that hinder their attempts at empowerment, one woman who didn't have any yet, explicitly told me in her own words that she considered bearing children as a source of power:

"I just want children. I would get busy then and my life would become more interesting. You can raise the children right then they will become your power."

Being an aged widow structured entirely different perception of their empowerment and other women's. While most of the married women saw their empowerment being hindered by the power their husbands had within the household, the widows had mobility and strong opinions on how empowerment is achievable. One of these women, Rukhshanda, who was 65, presently came and went as she pleased insisting that she had power, while during her interview, she told that when her husband was alive, she wasn't allowed to leave the house and led a restricted life. I also observed this as being the perception of women generally as during an FDG, while one woman was animatedly exclaiming that women shouldn't bear the oppression, should raise their voices and that they are as much to blame of they stay quiet, another woman sitting close by me whispered to the one next to her:

"Iska tou mian mar chuka hai, islye itni barh k bol rahi hai. Jab zinda tha…isko ghar se paon bhi bahar nai nikalne deta tha" meaning "Her husband is dead, that's why she is speaking so outwardly. When he was alive, he didn't even let her set foot out of the house."

At the time, I was amused to note that she stated the words in a carrying whisper, so that I could hear it, and looked at me to make sure I had. Many of the women painted pictures of their empowerment being hindered by the existence of their husbands and their hold, which didn't allow them to exercise any power.

On the other hand, women who were working out of necessity due to their financial situations and poverty, didn't perceive mobility or absence of husbands as empowering. The following comment was made by a widow who worked in a brick kiln:

"My children are very small and I work all day, seven days of the week, to put food in their bellies. How can I be happy when, even after working so hard and not spending time with them, I only get a small pay? I wish my husband was alive."

Women working as development experts defined it as decision making, providing skills and equal participation, gaining employment, knowing and availing rights acquired by interacting in the public sphere and being instinctive. These women, by their own definition, were already empowered and educated, so for them, it was a symbol of an aid. They were able to provide personalized account of their experiences to complement their definitions. Even amongst these, the resource person was different because she related to the local women more as she had the same financial status. Even from her position of authority in the project, her perspective on empowerment didn't differ much from that of the local women.

5.1.1.2 Arising from hindrances

Perceptions about empowerment arising from the hindrances as put forward by the women by and large led to the belief that their empowerment was not possible and could not be achieved. It was interesting to note that whether Christian or Muslim, the issues faced by the women were the same, which they highlighted as barriers. As already analyzed in detail, existence of the need for protection of honor and respect, men having patriarchal power, socialization of both men and women into gendered roles and religious beliefs, inhibit empowerment process by creating barriers which the women experienced. A summary of these hindrances and contextual inhibitors are given in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Hindrances and related contextual inhibiting factors

Hindrances	**Contextual Inhibitors**
Permission issues *Due to*: Earning responsibility of a man, bad environment, relatives talk, balancing responsibility of home	Protection of honor and respect, patriarchy, socialization

Household responsibilities *Due to:* lack of power in decision making (birth control), maternal instinct, belief woman's place is at home	Socialization, religion
Domestic violence *Due to:* don't want divorce, men have power	Patriarchy, socialization, protection of honor
Women as barriers *Due to:* men's upbringing, petty nature, taking advantage of empowered women	Socialization, patriarchy, religion
Lack of education *Due to:* lack of awareness, women's place is inside home	Patriarchy, socialization, religion

(Source: Fieldwork)

In the light of these findings and analysis of the factors involved, it can be seen that the women's perception of their empowerment is rooted in trying to be free of the suppression they face within their homes, because of the power men have over their lives, through restriction of mobility, not allowing them to have a say in decision making and not allowing financial independence. It is their belief that they cannot be empowered while they continue facing these hindrances.

That a woman can never be empowered in the context of her family responsibilities is very interesting as they believe that it is a cycle that doesn't allow the woman to break out of her disempowerment and attain freedom. She goes from one house, one responsibility, one expectation to the next one and in the midst of it all, doesn't find time to find herself. If she does, she is considered not taking her responsibilities – especially that of her children – seriously.

Maintenance of these perceptions about the impossibility of empowerment is carried out effectively by socialization and religion.

Then there was the perception of the lack of need of empowerment because they are happy the way they are. Many of the women also associated being empowered with being intent or happy with their lives, in the light of which, they believed that they didn't need empowerment. It was important to note that these same women also justified empowerment being unnecessary through their religious beliefs.

5.5.2 Restricted empowerment

According to the analysis of the data, in the instances when the women were of the view that they were empowered, they had power in some instances, and not in others. People have more or less power depending on their specific situation and they can be relatively powerless in one situation and relatively powerful in another. (Mosedale, 2005) Similarly, where some women had mobility and say in decision making, they didn't have a say in the financial matters. Where some had control over finances, they had to seek permission to go outside their homes. In the end, it came down to how much power was delegated by the males according to their wishes.

In addition to that, many of them looked at empowerment as a process occurring within the realms of their households. They defined it and perceived it to be symbolic of a woman's responsibilities and her role as a housewife, which also gives rise to a restricted notion of empowerment.

Third restriction of empowerment is in the religious parameters set – a woman needs to cover herself and protect her honor when she goes outside. However, once outside, she is restricted in doing only certain jobs by her weak physicality and less intelligence as compared to a man, and may attempt to empower herself but not exercise that power at home, in front of her husband, because that causes problems. What renders empowerment is then the sources it is derived from, which, in the case of women, is from adhering to religion and prescribed gender roles.

5.5.3 Entrenched in gender roles

The women constantly talked about their roles as mothers, wives and housewives, which they saw as being inevitable for a woman. It seems that in order to empower themselves, the women will need to free themselves from the rigidity of what it means to be a woman, as dictated by both culture and religion.

Their firm belief that women cannot be empowered grounded in the socialized perception that a woman's place at home speaks volumes in supporting this. While I was participating in a meeting conducted as one of Aawaz's activities, I introduced myself and mentioned that I am doing research. Upon hearing this, a woman remarked loudly:

"degree le k meri beti ki tarha ghar he bethna hai na" meaning "After getting the degree, you have to sit at home eventually, like my daughter."

Shocked, I hesitantly joined in the bout of laughter that followed this statement at the time but this signifies the thinking of the women and of the society around them – a female eventually has to get married and sit at home, her education or attempt at empowering herself will be futile in the end, when she has to look after her household responsibilities.

It was also apparent from the responses that women are so wrapped up in their responsibilities and daily routines as wives and mothers that they don't perceive empowerment as happening outside those parameters either. It isn't symbolic of going out or casting votes but rather, being a good housewife and not creating issues for her family, to gain a responsible position of power in her home.

In addition to that, some of the women who proclaimed that empowerment wasn't necessary were happy the way they were because of their belief that earning and providing for their basic needs was the role of a man, not the woman. They even went as far as to say that when a woman 'goes out' the system becomes imbalanced.

This distribution of roles and spheres is very real as I experienced it myself when I was interviewing the respondents. While the women were more comfortable when I spoke to them in their homes, men only hesitantly assented to talk to me in public spaces of their offices or shops. But within the public sphere, they were also not eager to answer my

questions because they saw me as being in their territory, and as a female, not having any right to ask for their opinions in a position of power. Public space is not a place for a woman to linger: it is the realm of the man.

In addition, although there is a clear understanding of gender roles, we still cannot place them in distinct boxes; for examples, brothers could be caring enough and not want their sisters to cry (which they use as a source of power) or indifferent enough to hurt them or not give permission. When it comes to relations, things overlap and while the bipartite division is sometimes clear, other times the lines blur. This gives an indigenous understanding of gender and empowerment even more significance.

5.5.4 From perception to interaction

Empowerment was, therefore, a symbol to which every woman attached different meanings from different perspectives: defined from the knowledge of what they knew to be sources of power (education, skills, jobs etc.); from the perspective of the role of a woman being at home and in terms of her responsibilities being her power within the domestic sphere; by outlining hindrances that they believed made obtaining power impossible; in comparing their power within the domestic sphere with the power of men; religious perspective in the justification of a man's power over woman and finally, in terms of their happiness and contentment in how they live, husbands covering all expenses – rendering any form of empowerment unnecessary.

The leading perception attached to empowerment was that it cannot be achieved in light of the hindrances that exist. The possibility of empowerment was entirely based on the mindset of the women and their situational opinions, which were shaped by their socialization and religious beliefs but the overwhelming agreement was that whatever a woman does, in the end, men have the power.

While the women offered their opinions on the definition and achievement of empowerment in a variety of ways, it was evident that in their roles as mothers and housewives, they prioritized their children and families and basic needs and desires above their requirement to be empowered. While they discussed empowerment and the

hindrances they faced readily, they accepted the fact that it was a foreign concept and doesn't apply to them because of the harsh realities of their lives.

The analysis of the data reveals that external assistance in achieving empowerment was mainly perceived to be of financial and emotional support. In addition, while the development experts on the grassroots level were aware of what Aawaz stood for, and had an understanding of how it assisted the women in being empowered, the local women – both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries – didn't know the details of the project that was attempting to empower them, nor did they perceive their empowerment (if taking place) happening within political parameters.

Now that extensive light has been shed on the beneficiaries' perception of empowerment – being a vehicle for multiple meanings - this needs to be kept in mind whilst moving on to the interaction between the women and the development team of the project who are operationalizing the project according to the specific outputs and goals defined.

6. MANIPULATION: HANDLING AND REASSESSING ACCORDING TO PERCEPTION

After the two covert stages, the third stage in Mead's four stages of an act – manipulation - is the overt stage, where the humans act towards the objects or people in their situation for everyone to see. Humans use their environment to their benefit; handing and reassessing the objects (resources and people) they encounter according to their use. After becoming aware of the situation, they use the opportunity provided, revise their plans and use it another way, handling the objects in situations as tools – a means to an end. (Charon, 2011, p. 122) This means that at this stage, humans choose to act in accordance to their understanding and perception.

After having discussed and analyzed in elaborate detail the perception of women in Dhoke Khabba about empowerment in providing a context, I have applied Charon's understanding of this stage of the act to disclose data that I gleaned as a participant observer in the project activities and the women's perception as participants. The women interacted with the development agency through the platforms provided by Aawaz and the project team in turn, attempted to empower them to the best of their abilities as planned in the project goals at stage one i.e. impulse.

The chapter starts with details about the operationalization of the project as observed by the researcher over the course of four months, with focus on the use of *Agahi* Centre, moving on to data input and monitoring, meetings, study circles and sessions conducted. This is complemented by the benefits and hindrances outlined by the women during and after their participation. Then it moves on an analysis of financial assistance as a motive, aid and hindrance, highlighting it as a sphere of manipulation.

The next sections use case studies to demonstrate unintended consequences of empowerment and manipulation at expense of empowerment, emphasizing on the role of women as active agents in their empowerment. Finally, analysis is presented in the last section on the actions of women in their interaction with the NGO.

6.1 Operationalization of the project outputs

Over the course of being in the field – being an observer as well as a participant observer – I was able to experience and take note of the main activities or 'building blocks' of Aawaz programme after it re-started in April 2017. First, my interaction with the team at grass root level took place in the *Agahi* Centre of UC 44, based in the office of Ahsas Welfare Foundation. Here, through the resource person (also a resident of Dhoke Khabba and my key informant) I built rapport with the women from Dhoke Khabba who were beneficiaries of the project, followed by visits to their houses in the village itself.

The resource center being the nexus of the interaction between the project team and the local women, was also the place where the monthly meetings and awareness raising sessions took place. This was complemented by monitoring meetings (of program manager and coordinator with resource persons) in Aurat Foundation's Islamabad based office and study circles (where discussions were held with ten to fifteen women in one of their houses on particular topics) within the locale.

Since I also conducted in-depth interviews with women from Dhoke Khabba, I was able to discover the women's personal opinions and their previous experiences whilst participating or having been participated in the project. I have also exhibited these findings in this section, in addition to my personal observations as a participant of the activities. All this data combines to provide a picture of the 'symbolic interaction' where empowerment has different meanings for all the stakeholders.

6.1.1 Resource (Agahi) center

As per the programming, this space was being utilized for meetings and activities related to Aawaz as well as housing written material on the social issues available for the local community. Charts bearing the structure of Aawaz, banners depicting its achievements and posters on information about laws, rights of women and general awareness raising were colorfully displayed on the walls of the entire space dedicated to the Agahi Centre, dutifully serving and displaying its purpose as a resource centre and a community place.

Figure 1. A pictorial view of the wall of Agahi centre where the charts and banners are displayed

(Source: Fieldwork)

The record of issues brought to the resource centre and the daily 'attendance' of those coming to the centre for assistance was kept in a register by the resource person, where she was required to note their name, purpose, CNIC number, take signatures and write the corresponding output number (1 for political, 2 for disputes and 3 for issues regarding services). According to my observation and documented evidence from the register, the main issues that women and men visited the resource center during the course of my field work were:

- Information about Benazir Income Support Programme
- Information about CNIC registration
- Seeking employment
- Information about 'skills learning' courses like stitching and beauty parlor course
- Applying for *rashan* (groceries) during *Ramzan*
- Financial assistance

The last two of which were the most dominant of the issues brought to the centre. In several instances, I interacted with the women who came seeking financial assistance. One of these women asked for monetary help because her father had passed away and she needed help with the rent of her house. While her plea appeared to be genuine, this was not the purpose of the resource center and she was told so by the resource person and members of Ahsas Foundation:

"Ham aisay logon ki madad nai kartay. Ham mashawarat wali madad kartay haim, mali madad nai" meaning "We don't help people like this. We help via advisement, not monetary help."

As a researcher, I found it very hard to stay objective and not give her money, especially when she started crying. However, this was first of the many instances of interactions of this nature with women from the village, which, I was assured was a regular occurrence and difficult to handle at times. Whereupon I analyzed that poverty was a major inhibiting factor whilst empowering women via mobilization, capacity building and awareness within the parameters of individual and eventually, political empowerment. This has been further analyzed in the second section of this chapter.

Similar observations were made during the month of Ramzan, in which the organization made an exception and helped the women financially and by giving them groceries, justifying it as *'sadqa for sawab'* meaning 'charity for reward in hereafter.' During the months leading to Ramzan and during the month, numerous women came with 'applications' for free groceries, both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. These applications, written in Urdu, contained the details of their poverty induced financial conditions and requested the organization to provide free groceries, with a copy of their CNIC attached to it. When inquired that how they found out about the process, they either referred to previous experiences with NGOs or that they found out through word of mouth.

It is an important point of analysis that the women have enough awareness, confidence and relevant information about the processes required to fulfill their daily needs. If not politically empowered within the planned goals and outputs of the project, the women do exercise empowerment when it comes to the basic needs of their lives.

6.1.2 Data input and monitoring

Before moving to details of the activities conducted with the local women, it is prudent to explain that the project was being operationalized by a two-fold team of Ahsas Welfare Foundation at the grass roots and Aurat Foundation at the upper level, interacting with the donor agency and ensuring that the project is being conducted in accordance with the programming.

The resource person for each resource center in the respective union councils was the liaison in this respect – providing the required data for monitoring and documentation and being responsible for the conduction of study circles and monthly meetings with the beneficiaries.

In the meetings with resource persons of each union council aimed to monitor and document the progress, the district coordinator of Aawaz inspected the registers containing the data from the resource centres. The data was tallied with the three outputs and in accordance with the number of cases/issues and the number of total visitors to the centre, the data was statistically analyzed through MIS (monitoring information system) to determine the functionality of the centre. Keeping in line with the project objectives, it was determined how many visitors came for:

- Newspaper reading
- Birth registration
- Benazir Income Support Programme
- Voter registration
- *Bait ul maal* applications
- Access to business
- Inheritance/property
- Access to mobile phones
- Complaint forms
- Contact numbers for departments
- Mother/child health care

- Domestic violence cases
- Conflict/ dispute resolution
- Demand articulation

These were the services offered by the resource center under the umbrella of Aawaz, aimed to empower the women at individual and political level by building their capacities.

In addition to this, the resource persons were given forms as data collection tools, where in relation to each output, there was extensive information required; the number of voter and CNIC registered etc., case specific data about the preemption of disputes and incidence of reported violence and the issues reported about health and education resolved through engagement with respective departments.

The monitoring was done through a monitoring expert who visited the *Agahi* centre and asked the women to fill closed ended questionnaires, while asking them questions from other closed ended questionnaires about the effectiveness of Agahi centre and their participation, keeping in mind the activities conducted under the outputs.

This is the structure and nature of data input at the upper level of the project chain gained through documentation, where empowerment is perceived through the perspective of Aawaz's planned programming to achieve the outputs and ultimately, its goal of empowerment of women.

6.1.3 Activities conducted

As per the programming of the project, awareness raising and training sessions were conducted at intervals to make the women politically aware through discussions. These were complemented by study circles on pre-planned topics and meetings monitoring the progress. As per my observations, these sessions and meetings were also the platform where the identification of possible disputes took place and the women were asked the issues related to service delivery.

6.1.3.1 Meetings

The first step for every meeting or session conducted was the selection of participants. This was done by the resource person in a three-fold process: first, by making calls to the women in the locale who had provided their contacts in the previous meetings, second, by contacting the focal person for the village and asking her to get the word around and third, by going to the houses door to door and telling them about the project, meeting being conducted and requesting their presence. The list of the participants was then to be provided to the team at Aurat Foundation.

The resource person had some trouble convincing the women to participate as the project had re-started after a break of several months. In addition, the women argued over the timings of the meeting as their free time varied. Mostly, the women who attended the meetings were those who had already attended the sessions over the past three years and came because of the relations created with the focal persons and the resource person. In the words of one of the focal persons of Dhoke Khabba:

"Everyone knows the work we are doing so of course these women go for us. We have enough ladies that when we need it, we can have the amount of members needed. We have made the links and those who can't come, then they can come to the next meeting."

Other respondents, women who had been coming to the meetings for three years, shared:

"She (resource person) used to live in our street. They did the first few meetings in our house and we used to ask the women to come. Now, whenever she calls, we go. *Rishta ban gaya hai* (a relationship has been created)"

"Ham dosti nibha rahay hain, hamen koi zarurat nai hai, amir hain ya ghareeb, ham izzatdaar hain" meaning "we are upholding friendships, else we don't need this. Rich or poor, we have respect."

Therefore, at this stage of the project, instead of mobilizing women who haven't been a part of the project before, the meetings were conducted with regular participants. This was an advantage in allowing them to refresh what they had already learnt and add to their knowledge. The participation by the women was dependent on the relations created

amongst the local women and those a part of the Aawaz team as empowered women but who used to be one of them before: resource person and focal person. This divides the local women of Dhoke Khabba into two groups: those considered target groups to be made aware and empowered and those a part of the project team as assisting in their peers' empowerment.

The topics covered in the meetings over the course of my field work included a discussion on domestic violence, awareness sessions on harassment laws and multiple identities of a woman which would lead to perceptions causing rifts and disputes. While the sessions that were orchestrated through representatives from Aurat Foundation were done with the assistance of extensive forms to be filled created for this purpose, the informal discussions conducted by members of Ahsas Foundation during monthly meetings were impromptu and general.

As per my observation, the women listened to a one way lecture on the topic delivered by a member of the NGO, not willingly participating in a topic-induced discussion, with a very non-serious and inattentive attitude. This behavior arose from their understanding that they didn't need awareness.

According to one of these participants:

"The topics discussed are the same ones over and over again. We know all this. There should be new topics brought to these meetings."

Another woman, a house wife, confided:

'I know all about my rights, like being a daughter or a wife or a mother. I don't see the need for calling us to these meetings."

Ironically, what she understood were her rights were her relations, and she needed the awareness more than anything. However, this shows that the women not only didn't pay attention to what they were being taught at the sessions, but didn't feel the need for their participation because they didn't require it. On the other hand, they were increasingly vocal when talking about the issues they were facing on everyday basis and lodging complaints which they expected the NGO to solve.

The issues brought up at the meetings I attended were lack of gas supply and water supply, load shedding, non-functional street lights and garbage disposal. The voicing of these complaints was keeping in line with output three, which was about accountability of service delivery. However, the themes of education and health were not put forth by the women. Rather, they wanted solutions to problems that were disrupting their everyday lives as housewives. In addition to this, when inquired in one of the meetings, the women didn't know about the institutions or individuals responsible for provision of these services at the local level, so they were not empowered enough to hold the government accountable without assistance from the NGO itself.

Therefore, the overall perception of the meetings was a lack of interest shown by the participants, where they only spoke with regard to what they thought concerned them at an everyday level and felt that they didn't need being made aware about their rights or about the existing laws. A majority of the women only listened and didn't interact. This is in relation with ulterior financial motives (analyzed in detail later) the hindrances they had already faced in coming to the meetings and their perceived difficulty in implementation of what was being discussed.

Figure 2. An ongoing meeting on multiple identities of women taking place in Agahi centre

(Source: Fieldwork)

6.1.3.2 Study Circles

There were two study circles conducted during the course of my field work, on the pre-planned topics of violence on women and awareness about transgenders. To be conducted in one of the houses of the local women, the resource person was required to note the minutes of the meeting, fill out an attendance sheet and create a report on the discussion. Each study circle consisted of ten to fifteen women gathered in one of the houses in the locale.

On the ground level, as a participant, I observed that while the women were more comfortable in the vicinity of their homes, the nature and structure of the study circle was same as the meetings. They listened to the Aawaz team deliver a speech on both the respective topics but they didn't interact with zeal. In both the study circles conducted, the women pointed out that they were already aware of what was being told to them.

In the study circle on awareness about transgenders for pre-emption of disputes, a woman commented:

"We are friends with the transgenders living in our street. They even serve as guardians for those of us (women) living alone as no male strangers dare enter the street because of them."

In the study circle on awareness about violence on women, a woman remarked:

"Even if we know about violence on women, what can we do about that? If we go to another's house and say that you were having a fight and is your husband being abusive, then they *say ye hamara issue hai, aapka nai hai, aap kon hotay hain bolne walay?* (This is our issue, not yours, who are you to speak about it?) It is a private matter."

Therefore, not only do the women feel that they don't need to have discussions on the topics selected, they also feel that it is difficult to implement the knowledge that they have learnt from the discussions, rendering them futile. I also observed that the women made it clear that they had taken out time to come to the neighboring house and were eager to leave to do their chores. In the light of these observations as a participant and the in-depth interviews with the participants, an analysis was done on the benefits women thought they achieved via the activities at village level and the hindrances women face, with an aspect of difficulty in implementation. This provides reasoning for the nature of their participation in the project activities whilst keeping in mind their perception about empowerment itself discussed in the previous chapter.

Figure 3. A study circle on transgenders being conducted in one of the houses in Dhoke Khabba

(Source: Fieldwork)

6.1.4 Benefits acquired from the activities

During the in-depth and conversational interviews with the women both at the Agahi Centre and in their homes, the women associated Aawaz and its activities with 'meetings at the office' and 'meetings at home' (study circles) and told the benefits that they acquired from these interactions through this platform.

A few of the women recounted the issues that were solved after they voiced these at the meetings over the years. Tahira, a housewife who had been a beneficiary of the project since its inception, shared:

"We have already been coming for so long, we can come and discuss the issues of the *mohalla* (neighborhood) and when we complained that the drains are not clean, the female councillor took notice and now everyday a sweeper comes to clean them."

Another housewife, Nusrat, who had been a participant for two years, stated:

"There was the issue of water in our street that got solved. There are also dustbins now and the garbage is picked by the cleaners."

According to them, these issues were resolved when they spoke about them in the meeting in front of the female councillor UC 44 (who is also a beneficiary of Aawaz) and she talked to the relevant departments on their behalf. Other women saw a change in themselves after being a part of the meetings and declared that they had been made more aware:

"Asan dil wich hosla aur sha'ur aya hai" meaning "We have now got higher morale and wisdom in our hearts" (Rukhshanda, housewife)

"We came to know about the violence on women and lots of other information. We talked to other women and it was fun as well." (Shagufta, housewife)

While they talked about their individual change in general terms, they were confident in stating that they did indeed benefit from the meetings. One of the women I interviewed thought about it and told me that she has gotten more confident. Then she clammed up and elbowed her younger sister sitting with us, saying: "you tell *na*, what benefit we got from the meetings at that office?" upon which her sister giggled and stated "we got the chance to go out of the house and gossip."

While it was apparent that the benefit she claimed she got (confidence) was yet to be put into practice, her sister's answer was similar to several other women's opinion on how they benefited from the meetings.

"We spend time together and have a very good time. A person needs their relaxing time, like kids go to school. We go there and feel happy." (Zubaida, housewife)

"Well it was an outing so that was good. I got to have a different atmosphere from the home and all the tensions." (Zehra, housewife)

These women, like the young sister, saw the meetings at the resource centre as a way to escape from the realities of their lives. For them, the chance for interaction with other women, away from the responsibilities of their homes, was a major benefit. As analyzed in

the previous chapter, the women – especially housewives - live very sheltered and restricted lives as a result of which they see the meetings as opportunities to socialize with other women. In the same instance, another housewife gave a very ambivalent response:

“I got to meet new people and I am not so afraid anymore. I can talk in front of my husband. But you know, his permission is necessary. So sometimes, he allows, sometimes, he ignores and other times I go secretly without telling him. So you could say I have been empowered!”

She saw meeting new people and her confidence as benefits achieved but at the same time, focused on the significance of her husband’s permission. This, being one of the hindrances to empowerment perceived by women, was heralded by this particular woman as evidence of her empowerment in that she managed to be evasive in spite of her restrictions. For her, her mobility – in going to the meetings – is in itself a source of power.

Other participants didn’t believe that they had been benefited at all. A Christian girl working as a sales person as a day job, declared:

“No, I haven’t got any benefit from the meetings.”

It might have had to do with the fact that she was different from the other beneficiaries in that she wasn’t married, was allowed to work and claimed that she was very happy and satisfied with her life. Nor did she face any issues in the community because of her religion. Some other women also responded along the same lines, but in their case, the reasons were entirely different:

“Not really. Just broadened the mind a little that we should help each other out but it is hard to apply in our lives because even when we know the law, we can’t interfere in other people’s lives.” (Fiza, student)

*“*What they say about women is good, at least someone is doing something for us. But I usually don’t have the time and when I do have some, I just think that I should go so that my mind freshens up. But I normally don’t have the time.” (Razia, housewife)

While they recognized Aawaz as a positive effort, they were uncertain about the practicality of its execution in their lives. From the difficulty in application of the laws to not being a regular at the meetings because of household responsibilities and resulting lack of time, this was only the tip of the ice berg when it came to the beneficiaries talking about the hindrances they faced, which in some cases, lead to them stop participating in the project altogether.

6.1.5 Hindrances faced and difficulty in practice

Analysis of these findings provides a significant insight into the perspectives of women on whether the empowerment as planned by the project is taking place or not at the village level, and in doing so, showcases the 'other side' of this interaction between the agency and women.

First, the women I interviewed made it clear that their ethical and moral considerations don't allow them to readily bring forward the disputes they witness or experience themselves even after being made aware on violence against women and how to resolve them:

"I would want to raise my voice against a case of violence but even when I find out about one, I avoid it. It is their *apas ka mamla* (private matter) so we can't speak up about it. It would be unethical." (Fehmida, housewife)

"Even when my neighbor was beating his wife, we couldn't do anything because its *ghar ka mamla* (private matter) and you can't interfere in personal lives." (Raila, student)

This, on the ground level, based on the realities of the women's lives and the society they live in, becomes an inhibition when Aawaz perceives dispute preemption and timely resolution as an output to be achieved and the women don't believe that it is possible because in case of disputes regarding domestic violence, they are a personal matter, not to be interfered with. The norms of the society dictate the actions of women following their awareness. Other women opined that it was not easy to apply what was learnt because it was difficult being the voice of reason in their homes:

"It's not easy to act upon it. It depends on the thinking of people – it's difficult to make people think the way you do, especially at home. *Magar ab har situation mein tou banda bol nai sakta, kabhi khamosh rehna parta hai* (But we can't speak up in every situation, sometimes we have to stay silent)" (Tabassum, student)

"I did try but it is no use. One woman can't really do anything useful if the whole household is not aware." (Rehma, housewife)

"No, because it is hard to change the mindset of the family where we go home to. *Yahan se tou ghar he jana hota hai na* (we still have to go home from here)." (Atia, housewife)

They accepted that they had learnt from the meetings and sessions but didn't feel that it was just as easy to apply it to their lives because the atmosphere of their homes and the mentality of the other members of the household was not conducive to these attempts. These opinions, especially the last of which, emphasized on the fact that following the meetings, they have to go home – return to the realities of their lives, implying that therein exists the difference between them and the development experts trying to empower them. In the context of returning homes to their lives, other respondents shared that the responsibilities that come with returning home also hinder the application of their learning.

Two of the housewives, regular participants of the meetings, shared:

"I have learnt things but haven't used it. I know at least that I can tell about my issue in the office but other people don't go with me. They have their own responsibilities at home and say we don't have time for these things."

"There is a law against everything and I think they told about them in the meeting but don't remember when I get home as there is a lot of work to do."

It was apparent that the women didn't remember the specifics of the awareness sessions because when inquired about what they had learnt, they were evasive and used general words like laws, violence against women etc. Some of them quoted what they had heard at the meetings but said that they couldn't apply it to their lives. One of the younger women emphasized on this and the difference between her and 'them – NGO' when she retorted:

“They come and ask us questions we know nothing about because it isn’t our field. They know, we don’t. It makes me feel very bad. Even when I do attend the meeting, and listen to them telling me about laws or something, I don’t remember when I get home. While this is all they do, I have a hundred other things to do at home! ”

While she supported her reasoning with the fact that she got very busy when she got home and forgot what she had heard, she also focused on feeling bad when she was asked about things she didn’t know as it wasn’t her expertise. Her position left her at a disadvantage and this put a negative feeling about the interaction in her mind. The productivity of what the women hear at the meetings is futile in the face of their lives’ realities which include numerous responsibilities, making them easily forget what they perceive not as important as their actual, daily lives.

This was a very crucial aspect of hindering the women’s empowerment through the platform of Aawaz because through the in-depth interviews of several women conducted within their homes in Dhoke Khabba, I discovered that this was also one of the main reasons why they stopped participating in the project altogether.

Some of them highlighted the responsibilities of their children as the main factor which lead to the end of their interaction i.e. the empowerment process. Few of the respondents brought it to attention that they were not allowed to bring their children to the meetings as they caused disruption, but this lead to them not coming altogether:

“No I don’t go to the meetings anymore because they say that you are not allowed to bring children and there is no one to look after them. They disturb a lot, as you can see even now.” (Nusrat, mother to two young sons and a daughter)

“I used to, but then I couldn’t because of the children. You see how they aren’t even letting me sit still for even 2 minutes.” (Rafia, mother to three sons under seven years of age)

Sure enough, it was apparent even during the interview that the women’s lives revolved around looking after their young children who kept interrupting and didn’t allow the women to even talk in peace. Another woman, mother to four sons and a daughter, shared:

“I stopped coming because it is not easy to take out time. I am busy with the children, do cooking and even now, was washing clothes before you came.”

Therefore, their busy schedules and lack of time not only hinder application of what has been learnt but also lead to an end to the initial attendance. Two of the women associated their decision of not participating anymore with their protection of honor:

“log baten banatay thay k pata nai ye kin logon mein jaati hain” meaning “People used to make rumors that we don’t know what kind of people they interact with” (Sawera, housewife)

“We came to the meetings and everyone knew in the neighborhood. *Sab puchtay thay kidhar jarahay ho…log baten kartay thay aur acha nai lagta tha…is se acha banda ghar bethay* (everyone asked where are you going and talked about us, I don’t like it, it’s better to stay at home)” (Sharmeen, housewife)

These women faced issues as consequence of going to the meetings and made the decision themselves to stop because it was becoming a matter of their honor and respect in the society. Where the societal pressure played a part in hindering the empowerment process of project, other women didn’t make the decision themselves, they were forced to make it:

“I used to go at first but then my husband forbade me to go. He used to let me go before but now he doesn’t like it. He might have found out that there are men there as well.” (Ramsha, housewife)

A few women shared similar experiences in an FDG: “When we told them (husbands) what is discussed, they told us: don’t go to the meetings again.” Another woman joined in: “*they say ye tum logon ka dimagh kharab karahay hain* (they are poisoning your minds)”

The men, not liking the intermingling of their wives with strangers and the prospect of the women in their families being ‘taught’ to raise their voices, forbade the women to participate in the project. Here, the men’s power over their wives become a hindrance to the project. However, some of the women, while stating that their husbands didn’t allow them to go, willingly compromised to protect their marriages, insisting that other things are more important than their attempts at empowering themselves, like a wife shared:

"I didn't used to get permission so I used to go secretly. My husband had a full time job back then so I didn't tell him and used to tell at home that I am going to a friend's house but after some months, I thought that I have given my number as well and if he finds out from outside then he will stop trusting me so I told him. But then he stopped me from going. I am okay with it. Trust is the most important thing."

A group of women that I conversationally interviewed in their home confided:

"We used to come a lot at first. We don't come anymore because *hamne khud he mana kardia* (we said no ourselves.) They (husbands) listen to many things we say and we have to compromise with them on certain things. It was easy for us to stop going to meetings, so we did."

From the women's perspective, it was easier to compromise than create a big issue about it. It is important to note the similarities between these reasons provided by the women for not coming to the meetings anymore (i.e. not participating in the project activities) and their perception of empowerment as a whole where they believed that it was not possible due to the very same hindrances. One of the same hindrances was shared by a member of AF:

"I had a love marriage and now after 4 years, he wants that I stay at home and leave my job and look after my child. My inspiration in life is my job. I have never asked anyone for anything after my father. I tell my husband I can't leave my job, I'll manage. I get the vibe from him that job is my hobby so managing it with the family is then my responsibility. It's an extra burden."

Not only does this highlight a point of analysis that at every level, the issues faced by women are the same – be it a woman in a position of responsibility within the project or the local women attending the meetings, but also that when it comes to their roles as wives and their honor, they experience the same backlash.

While some of the women made the decision of not continuing their interaction with the development agency and discontinuing their empowerment process via Aawaz because of their everyday lives, a huge majority of the women justified and were motivated to attend

the meetings and awareness sessions because of their assumption that NGOs carrying out the project have money and their volunteerism in being participants would be reciprocated financially. This hindered the process of empowerment via Aawaz at ground level but at the same time, acted as a motivating factor.

6.2 Financial assistance

Financial assistance was one of the main pillars of women's manipulation at ground level as part of their interaction on the platform of Aawaz. This arose from their perception that empowerment wasn't possible due to many hindrances they face but if they were participating in the project activities in spite of those barriers, they should be rewarded. This also leads to analysis on this being a path of non-traditional empowerment for the women and the existence of different perspectives on this within the team operationalizing the project.

6.2.1 The need and significance of monetary help

It is necessary to provide a context for the significance of financial assistance for the women, as many of them emphasized on the need and importance of money during their interviews. This will assist in understanding why women reassess and handle their interaction on the Aawaz to benefit themselves. Many women willingly offered their opinions on the importance of finance in daily lives:

"See, in every house, every fight and issue starts from money. If a brother comes asking for money, you give it to him, there is no issue. If you refuse, then he would become rude, leading to a fight. There is a disturbance in the household just because of money. When getting married, you can't give good dowry without money. If you have money, you have everything." (Shehla, doctor)

According to this perspective, since money is the source of the fights within the household, a steady stream of it in the hands of a woman means that she will be able to keep the peace. In addition, it is required to fulfill the basic needs like the example of putting together a

dowry for daughters. Another woman have examples of other basic needs that she needs to cover, whilst her husband is out of a job:

"You see, there is the cost of electricity, gas, food and children's fees. My children come back from the street and say give us 5 or 10 Rupees to buy candy. When I am at home, I deal with it and distract them but when my husband is home, he gets very worried and doesn't know what to sell for the children. He either scolds them or fights with me because he gets worried about expenditures. I wish I could get my hands on money to cover them." (Nusrat, housewife)

"Paisa nai hai kuch bhi nai hai. Mujhe apna ghar pakka karna hai, bachon ki fees deni hai aur mere kam se bhi kharcha pura nai hota" meaning "If you don't have money, you have nothing. I want to get my house cemented, pay children's fees and the expenses aren't covered even from my work." (Faseeha, housemaid)

Whether a housewife or a working woman, at the end of the day, they have responsibilities and needs that requires money on a daily basis. From the small pressures of children asking for money to buy candy to the bigger pressure of a sturdier house, these needs are the reality of the women's lives. It is also the source of fights between husband and wife, as the pressure of expenses leads to a strained atmosphere. Another housewife, with a stay at home husband, shared:

"*Bas meri jaib garam rahay tou wo khush rehte hain mujh se* (As long as my I have money, he stays happy with me) I took a lot of money from my brothers, sisters and even neighbors but haven't paid that debt yet. It's very stressful."

Other respondents shared their opinion on the importance of money in a very dejected manner, citing their poverty as a state of powerlessness while the rich have the power.

"Jiske ghar paisa hota hai uske bewaqoof log bhi sianay hotay hai. Hamen kon suntan hai, ham tou ghareeb hain" meaning "those who have money, their stupid people are also considered wise. Who will listen to us? We are poor." (Azra, housewife)

"The guards don't let me inside my children's school because I don't have a CNIC but when I went to Nadra van, they said that you need a B form for that. When my mother went

to get that made, they said that your daughter has been married for 10 years and will cost 10 thousand Rupees. We can't afford that. Even CNICs are for the rich." (Nusrat, housewife)

In the light of one of the project outputs being political participation of women, this can be highlighted as a barrier to achieving that goal because getting a CNIC made also requires money, which the women cannot afford. In this instance, the women perceive power being with those who have money.

From requiring it to fulfill daily expenses, keep the peace in house, good relations with the husband and to cater to unplanned expenditures, the analysis of the data reveals that women living in Dhoke Khabba perceive money to be a source of power and an essential need, therefore, this provides the circumstances within which women actively 'manipulate' the NGOs into giving them money for their participation, as exhibited in the section below.

6.2.2 Money - a motive, aid and hindrance

Interestingly, in a two-fold analysis, money symbolized as power demanded by the women was also a symbol in that there were different meanings attached to it, as explained by individuals at different levels of the project. The section has been divided into three parts – each signifying a level.

6.2.2.1 Rent – as a motivation

The first time I came across the word 'rent' during my field work was in the register documenting the issues women came to *Agahi* centre for – where women had come to inquire about it frequently. Upon asking the resource person what it meant, she explained:

"After the first few meetings, the women say that we are benefiting you, now you should do something for us in return. They say we don't need awareness, we are more aware than you are. Our meetings sometimes fail because they are the volunteers and they refuse to come because they are not getting anything (financial)."

This was the main reasoning provided by the local women (and beneficiaries) for their demands of provision of rent for their participation. It is important to note that they voiced their perception about not requiring 'awareness i.e. empowerment' to the resource person. Later during the course of time spent with the women and at the centre, I experienced the significance of 'rent' as a motivation for women to be active participants in the meetings orchestrated for their benefit.

When I accompanied the resource person to the locale to get the word around about the project starting up again, one woman artfully reminded her:

"The last time, we all waited for hours but not given what we were due. We can't come for just some refreshments. We should be given more respect this time."

Without mentioning money, she demanded it as a pre-requisite for the guarantee of participation by her and others. Regarding refreshments, another resource person that I conversationally interviewed opined:

"I think you should give a poor person the kind of food that they have never had before. The women notice this thing a lot – what food is given. If you have to spend money, give cash instead. Money matters, not one plate rice."

In addition to their respect being attached to the provision of rent on a time, as promised, the quality of food provided on the meetings was also attached to the respect they expect the NGOs to provide them. Other participants of the project whom I interviewed at their homes, explained 'rent' as a motivation for coming to the meetings.

"If I just go to meetings, then where will I eat from? If they (NGO) have the money, then they should also help financially because then we would be motivated to take more steps. Even if it's a few, when a woman stands on her feet, *wo apke sath awaz se awaz mila k baat ker sakti hai* (she can raise her voice to your level)" (Farzana bibi, housemaid)

"Meetings are good but the money is better. I use it for the fees of my children, their (NGO's) money will be well used." (Razia, housewife)

The underlying assumption that changes it from a demand to a right is that NGOs have money and they are obligated to help the women out financially in addition to the meetings conducted. Here, money is also associated with a woman standing on her feet and raising her voice, whereupon she played on the words and objectives of the project to support her argument. So basic needs have to be fulfilled in order to raise a voice. Especially in the cases of women who have sources of income, participation is seen to be a waste unless there is a monetary benefit. This is keeping in line with the perception of women discussed in the previous chapter where they don't feel they need to be made aware or empowered. The local resource person summarized it effectively:

"*Log kyun volunteer karenge?* (Why would they volunteer?) These women don't just want refreshments, they want money. We resource persons are answerable to the people. If these women are earning at home, then why would they volunteer to spend 2 to 3 hours here for us?"

It was interesting to note that the activities conducted were seen to be the women doing a favor to the NGO rather than vice versa, where the women's main motivation for participation was the rent. Incidentally, I interviewed one of the beneficiaries of the project after a meeting conducted as an awareness session in which she was a participant. In her interview, she launched into a tirade, which allowed me further perspective into the point of view of the local women:

'Why did they call us if they weren't going to give us rent? I left my stitching to go there, why would I go there then if I could have earnt 350 Rupees here at home? I earn and then eat, that's the truth. Why did I waste my time there yesterday then? My children are studying, I have to pay their fees, buy the food for the house etc. Everyone is leaving their work and household duties behind to come to the meetings and when they don't get anything, it's a waste of their time.'

Her attendance and active participation in the discussions of the meeting was subject to the rent. As a woman, she had everyday expenses that she needed the money for and upon not receiving what she was due, she went as far as to declare the meeting a waste of time.

Their belief that they don't need empowerment (as defined by Aawaz) and if they do, it is impossible to be empowered in the face of hindrances, leads to them reassessing the situation and handling the empowerment process on the platform of Aawaz in accordance to their needs. They perceive the money to be the cost of the time they provide to the organization in lieu of their participation.

In addition, it has already been established in the previous chapter that women perceive control over finances as a source of power within the household, which is in the hands of men. An independent source of income (through the project) to fulfill their basic needs is seen as an opportunity to be availed by the women as this economic contribution may lead to an increased role in decision making and greater status i.e. increasing their power in the domestic sphere.

6.2.2.2 Seed money – as an aid

This perspective on the money demanded was put forward by members of the organization working at grass roots level – in close relation with the local women i.e. Ahsas Welfare Foundation (AWF). According to one of the founding members:

"The question is what we are 'giving' to the community. If they (donors) can't give this money then they might as well lead the project on without any participants. The community is not happy because they haven't received their previous dues. It is about creating a relation with them and keeping promises."

This monetary help is therefore, seen as an aid to the empowerment process of project, where it assists in creating a relation with the beneficiaries and allows the organization at the grassroots to acquire participants. Another member of the organization explained:

"They do learn all these things with interest but they need some money as well. Their concept is this that this is an NGO and they have money. They ask outright that *'kyun khol k bethay ho agar madad nai karni'* (why have you opened it if you aren't going to help us (financially)?"

As already discussed in the previous section, this is indeed the widespread assumption and image of non-governmental organizations in the area that it is their obligation to help the

women in any way possible, but most importantly, financially. This can be attributed to the routinization of the NGO existence in the area, where the women have interacted with many organizations over the years and have pre-conceived notions according to those experiences.

Apart from this, they also provided justification for providing this 'seed money' to the women when they conduct the study circles at the women's houses by stating:

"Even if we are going to people's houses, we are doing it in one house. The rest are coming from their own houses and taking out time, *ham unko zehmat de rahay hain* (we are bothering them)"

This again added to the conception that the women are the ones doing a favor to the project team, by taking out time and participating in the activities, rather than the other way around. This 'seed money' was also seen as an aid to the empowerment process of project because of its tangible existence:

"Women need seed money because there needs to be something done economically so that the development is visible. It's not about the money, but the fact that all this time that we are spending for the community, the benefit should be visible to that community."

Therefore, empowerment through project was perceived to be only beneficial if it was something that was visible to the community, which, in this case, was the seed money. The resource person, also a member of the grass roots organization, emphasized on how important the money was for the women because she herself was from Dhoke Khabba and knew the situations these women were in. She shared:

"My children are totally dependent on me, on what I earn through stitching and this job. I am responsible for their fees, clothes, eatables etc. So when I didn't get my salary the past month, I was very worried. I know what it is like for the women to need money. Every little bit helps."

She emphasized on the importance of the seed money by looking at is a rightful demand by the women because she sympathized with their lives, which were very similar to her own. She related to the women even though she was in a position of authority within the

project, signifying that in the end, the needs of the women in the locale are the same, because of their lived realities.

6.2.2.3 Travel allowance – as a hindrance

This explanation was provided by the members of the consortium partner organization with the funding agency – Aurat Foundation (AF) – responsible for overseeing the operationalization of the project at grassroots level as per the programming of the project.

The difference between AF and AWF at grassroots level was apparent when in one of the meetings, where an AF representative addressed the women present and declared:

"All of you are different because you want to be aware and you come together to solve issues. If we give you travel cost, then we don't think that you cannot survive without it or you will be rich with it. Are you here because of that money? No you are not."

None of the women present at the meeting disagreed with the statement, even though many of my respondents were in attendance and had shared their opinions with me. It was clear that even though it was an essential motivation for their participation in meetings, it was a taboo to speak of in the meetings because even though it happened, it wasn't given a significance in the project planning or documentation. Instead, the women held the resource person accountable for the provision of this money.

This money, however, was factored in the project planning under the overhead costs of the project like travel allowance and refreshment provided at the meetings and study circles, rather than how the women perceived it be. A respondent from AF shared in her interview:

"We have limited budget so TA is an issue. This is more prominent in the urban areas like Rawalpindi, not as much in rural areas. We are working with vulnerable segment of society so they will leave their own work to come and if she is spending 50 Rupees of her own to travel there, then we need to compensate for her time cost. If we can't do that, they are least interested."

There is awareness about its negative impact on the project at the grassroots level but at this level, it is considered a compensation for the travelling done by the women to reach the centres for the meetings. However, in reality, it has other symbolic value for the women.

One of members from AF, who visited the Agahi centre from the AF office based in Islamabad, explained:

"We didn't give TA (travel allowance) in the first year, but then when we started giving it in second last quarter. Now, we can't do anything without giving it. Even though I am travelling all this way, and they are coming right from the community, the women expect to be paid."

What was given as travel allowance for meetings conducted away from the locale, then turned into a hindrance to the empowerment process as the women began perceiving it as 'rent' for their participation in the meetings and saw it as their right, motivating them to attend. Yet another perspective on this monetary assistance was shared during an interview with the Program Manager:

"Yes, they are now used to it in the Rawalpindi district. We can't say that it is dependency, we say that volunteerism is very low. The actual model of mobilization of the forum is not that strong in Dhoke Khabba. The women are struggling for others, giving them space and support in nurturing them. I feel like it is value for money. If we give travel cost and someone gets to listen to something good in meetings, and decides to act on it, then what is the harm?"

While this opinion spun a positive spin on the travel allowance as hindering the project's empowerment process at the ground level, this was mostly because at this level, the reality of what the women perceived the monetary assistance to be, had not yet been absorbed. However, admittedly, volunteerism was very low in Dhoke Khabba, as experienced and seen from the perception of women about empowerment and their interaction with the organizations on Aawaz platform.

Whether perceived to be a motivation, an aid or a hindrance to the project's empowerment process, analysis of the data suggests that women did in fact, re asses and handle the situation i.e. interacting with the organizations through Aawaz according to their perceptions. The symbolic interaction between the stakeholders of the empowerment process is exemplified in the women taking one of the objects – money- in their interaction as a tool (a means to an end) and using the situation to their benefit accordingly. There

were other parameters of this 'manipulation' as well; these have been analyzed as case studies in the sections below.

6.3 Unintended consequence of empowerment

The analysis of the findings has henceforth been provided in the shape of a case study. This is because case studies help us understand processes of events and to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue. A case study simplifies data to be considered by the reader and illuminates meanings for evaluation, sometimes used as an end product of a field based research. (Laws & McLeod, 2006)

In this instance, both the cases illuminated in this section and the next provide an interpretation of data by providing a description of the event orchestrated by a particular woman and then analyzing the reasoning behind it. In doing so, establishing how each woman used her position of interaction with the development agency as a means to an end; bringing new points of analysis of how women's perception of empowerment translates into action at the ground level.

6.3.1 Case study

The subject of the first case study is a woman named "Zara" (a pseudonym), a sixteen year old who lived in Dhoke Khabba with her parents, five sisters (four older, one younger) and an older brother. Her father had a grocery shop, while her mother did stitching at home to cover expenses. Zara had been a beneficiary of Aawaz since the inception and had been coming to the meetings regularly for the past year.

When the project started again in April, Zara's mother came to the *Agahi* centre and disclosed that her daughter had been missing for a month and it was the parents' belief that she had been kidnapped. Agitated and emotional, she urged the organization to use their resources to find out where her daughter was. The following week, I accompanied the resource person to Zara's house, where she went to find out whether the teenager had returned home safely. Upon talking to both parents, we discovered that her father had found out through his sources that

Zara had not been kidnapped, she had run away with a married man. She was currently in Sargodha with the man, seeking shelter in a religious sanctuary which provided protection to runaways. The father informed us that when he visited the place, he was told that if his daughter wants to go back with him voluntarily, she can. But when he met his daughter – in the presence of the men who ran the sanctuary – she refused and said that she had come by choice, not by force. So he got her '*nikkah*' done with the man she had run away with, to protect his family's honor.

Both parents were distressed but also shocked that their daughter would take such a step. They said that they don't let their daughters take even a step out of the house, but they trusted Zara and allowed her to go to the meetings. Her actions were having a negative repercussions for the family's honor. In her father's own words: "It's a question of our honor. If she is happy there then it's her choice but she should have thought about us and her sisters. I feel that she will never be happy because she won't be able to meet us ever again. If we keep *taaluq* (contact), then people will call us *begherat* (shameless). My extended family also humiliated us and asked me that is this the upbringing you have done?"

Another consequence was the impact on Zara's sisters. Her mother told about her other daughters are being affected: "My three unmarried daughters are not allowed to go out of the house and are not getting any marriage proposals either. One of them was engaged to be married but her engagement was broken when the word got around about Zara's actions. The two married ones are hearing things from community as well. My youngest was about to give the papers of 9th grade but her father forbade her to go out. He trusted Zara so much that now he doesn't trust them anymore even if they may not do the same."

Both parents now saw the project and the organization in a negative light, saying: "We sent our daughter to be empowered, look what it did to us. When she came late, she said that she had a meeting and we trusted her. This trust lead us to

Sargodha which we had never even seen before." The resource person tried her best to offer comfort and assure them that this was an exception and not to let it affect the other daughters, but they remained resolutely firm.

When I inquired about Zara from the team present at *Agahi* centre, who had interacted with her, they shared that she was an intelligent girl and while was shy at the beginning, slowly gained confidence. Lately when she came to the meetings, she brought a man with her – a stranger. When they got suspicious and inquired about him, she introduced him as her cousin who dropped her there and said he won't come again. According to them, once the women leave the premises of the centre, the organization is not responsible for them but it was clear that she used the meetings as a way to meet him. However, they accepted that Zara's actions had negative consequences for the project as the image in the community had been tarnished.

6.3.2 Analysis

Within the context of a Pakistani society, a woman making the decision to run away with a man without the blessing of her parents, is not an acceptable use of her personal choice or an acceptable arena of empowerment. In accordance to the cultural norms, this action was wrong and was an unintended consequence of the girl's empowerment via the project.

Analysis of the case study shows that Zara's increasing confidence and sense of power resulted in her taking advantage of the mobility provided to her by her parents for participation in the project activities. This unintended consequence of empowerment of a beneficiary ironically was a hindrance to the overall empowerment process, as this lead to a negative image of the project spreading through the community. One of the members of Ahsas Foundation opined: "We do all this to empower women but sometimes they get too empowered, having too much confidence and end up making mistakes – who is accountable for these? This is why people don't send their girls to these activities because then the girls become bold and make mistakes."

Therefore, the possibility of unknown and unintended consequences of a woman's empowerment brought about through the project's platform was an inhibiting factor in

empowering women. While those associated with the project termed it as 'getting too empowered' and making mistakes, for Zara's parents, empowerment was perceived as trouble because their daughter had been 'empowered enough' to run away and they were now wishing that they had not given her the freedom that many other women in the community don't have in the first place.

Two of the inhibiting contextual factors specified in the previous chapter – protection of honor and men's patriarchal power over giving permissions – were put into practice for the other daughters after the backlash experienced from empowering one daughter and allowing her mobility as well as giving permission to interact in the public sphere.

Another point of analysis derived from Zara's decision to run away is that she may have perceived – not unlike other respondents – that it wouldn't be possible for her to exercise any type of power, being hindered and suffocated by the community she lived in. She was under the power of her father who may not appreciate her choice in a life partner, so she made the decision to start her life elsewhere, where she would be independent.

It can be seen that as a beneficiary of the project, she gained the confidence and boldness that was required of her to raise her voice, but she re assessed and handled the circumstances to her own benefit, using the opportunity provided to her in accordance with her perception of her own life. Zara may be empowered, but she left a trail of consequences in the wake of her personal decision which ended up restricting the power of her sisters and impacting the project image.

6.4 Exploitation at the expense of empowerment

The second case study describing the event showcasing manipulation of women at the local level of the project took place during the course of my field work and thus draws from my own participant observation at the *Agahi* centre, whereupon I interacted with the woman and was able to witness the attempts at dispute resolution by members of Ahsas Foundation firsthand.

6.4.1 Case study

The subject of this case study is a 38 years old woman named "Uzma" (a pseudonym); an educated housewife (FA pass) with three children whose husband worked as a tailor. She lived with her family in Dhoke Khabba in one portion of a rented house and was not well off.

She came to the Agahi centre one day, crying profusely, with her youngest son in tow. In her own words, she said that her husband beat her and turned her out of the house. She was incoherent and emotional so it was hard to understand her but she declared that he kept asking her for money, had sold all of her things, clothes and jewelry and she had had enough. He also hit her children. He was about to hit her in the stomach with scissors and she feared for her life as he had threatened to kill her. She had an air of helplessness, said that she wanted to leave him and was worried for her children's safety.

She went on to state, whilst crying, that it was an arranged marriage and she didn't have any parents to go to, she just needed the organization's help to stand on her feet so that she could put a roof over her children's head while she searched for a job. Everyone present at the centre sympathized with her and while promised to help her get divorce, told her that a temporary solution would have to be reached. They offered to take some groceries to her home as an act of appeasement in front of the husband, and act as a support group for Uzma, talking to him and calming him down. She protested, saying that escort to her home wasn't needed and that her husband would get angry. They assured her that she has the organization's support and her husband will be held accountable if he tries to harm her in their presence or afterwards.

In the follow up of this domestic violence case, upon reaching her home, the NGO support group discovered that the woman had been lying. The female owner of the house – as a neutral party - stated that the husband is a good man and Uzma is prone to creating a fuss over nothing. Not only did they discover that it was a love marriage, but also that while the couple fought a lot, they were both to blame as

she also raised her hands on him, to which he retaliated.

They also met the husband in question, who apologized to them for the inconvenience his wife had caused due to a personal dispute. He stated that he loved his wife very much and there are fights in every home. He may have shouted in anger but he wouldn't hurt her the way she portrayed. Their daughter took her father's side and said that he loves mother very much but they both fight a lot and her mother gets very emotional. During these exchanges, Uzma was present but when asked to defend herself, didn't say anything and looked guilty.

6.4.2 Analysis

It was apparent that Uzma exaggerated a lot while telling her story and used emotional blackmail as an attempt to get financial assistance and groceries that she knew the organization was capable of providing her with. What she wasn't expecting was the escort to her home where the reality of the situation was discovered.

Analysis of the case study shows that Uzma exploited her gender and played the victim on a platform that she knew to be working for the welfare of women. She knew that she had the power of the first word, where everyone would believe her because she is the weaker gender. She exploited her position and her gender just because she was emotionally charged and upset.

While the domestic dispute itself was a reality, this also sheds light on the difficulty faced by the development agencies in trying to solve matters that belong in the private sphere, not knowing the authenticity or the reality until they probe further. The emotional abuse of the woman – even if she did go through it - was not apparent, but physical abuse can be observed. It is a hindrance to the process of women's empowerment at this level of the project.

Ironically, the women also know how to use their gender as a source of power to benefit themselves from opportunities that are offered as an attempt to empower them like the existence of the *Agahi* centre. She wasn't a direct beneficiary as participant of the meetings but she was aware about the existence of an NGO in the vicinity. In this case, the

manipulation through exploitation of the organization's resources and her own gender happened at the expense of empowerment because this lead to a lack of trust from the organization's side when attempting to empower women, having been accustomed to the women's power of manipulation.

6.5 Discussion and Analysis

The collected findings exhibited in this chapter unravel the process of empowering women in Dhoke Khabba, which is not simple. It is full of negotiations and compromise in the light of women's own criterion of meaning. The women act and are affected by their perceptions of empowerment arising from the realities of their lives on the platform of Aawaz and the members of NGO conducting it on the grass root level. Hence, empowerment is seen as a symbolic interaction - both attach meanings to it and in some cases, women adopt different pathways to achieving it by utilizing the opportunities provided for their own respective goals.

These different perceptions of empowerment have lead to multiplicity of meanings when it comes to using the term in a certain context. There is a realization that empowerment is not a monolithic term, and cannot be homogenously applied as it is understood differently by the women and in relation to the project. Therefore, for ease of understanding, a distinction has been made between the two dominant understandings of empowerment: that of indigenous women and Aawaz respectively. From here on, during discussion and analysis, 'empowerment' (in single quotation marks) is specifically referring to empowerment as per Aawaz's perception and definition of the word.

6.5.1 The practicality of empowerment process and multiplicity of meanings

In presenting findings about what was observed as a participant observer in the project activities and subsequent experiences shared by the women, the analysis of the data suggests that the women's perception about empowerment translated into their interaction with the NGO within the restricted spheres of their practical lives.

The women's participation in meetings relied on the relations existing with the women who were a part of the project team (at ground level), considering them essentially as 'one of them' and with whom they would have to interact on a daily basis in the community. Also, once a part of the meetings, their main focus was resolution of issues that they faced on a daily basis. For them, awareness sessions came under the prospect of 'empowerment' that they didn't need.

While highlighting the benefits, the resolution of everyday issues they faced as housewives was emphasized. However, for most women, it was an opportunity for them to relax and get away from the reality of their lives, seen as contributing to their social life, while some heralded this mobility in itself as a source of power. The women's sense of empowerment started with them being out of their homes at the meetings and ended with bringing the issues forward rather than knowing how to solve them themselves and which agency to complain to in such instance. There was awareness but lack of ability to take required action.

Also important in this regard was the reasoning behind the inability to implement what they learnt at the meetings and the hindrances they faced. This was rooted in the practicality of their lives, where on their return home, they had to focus on their roles as wives, mothers and sisters, rather than their roles as women being mobilized to raise their voice through awareness. They saw the latter 'empowerment' as a concept that could be talked about in meetings but couldn't be implemented in their lives.

A wide majority of the women stopped their participation in the project due to the very same reason, when their responsibilities, honor and relations with husbands began to be affected by it. It has already been discussed in the previous chapter that the women perceive empowerment as not achievable because of the same hindrances. While their perceptions may have emerged from their experiences, the analysis of the data reveals that in choosing between their 'empowerment' and their roles as wives and mothers as dictated by societal norms, they chose the latter because it was closer to the realities of their everyday lives and wasn't worth jeopardizing.

Therefore, the analysis reveals that when the women's perception of empowerment rooted in the realities and beliefs clashed with the project's process of 'empowerment', it came down to the practicality of the empowerment process in its application in the women's lives. In this case, it was seen to be impractical and hence these women handled the situation as they knew to be beneficial for them – they stopped participating.

6.5.2 Demanded reciprocity as exercise of power

While some of the women handled the clash between their perception and the project's operationalization by choosing their domestic lives, other women's confidence in their lack of need for 'empowerment' and impossibility of 'empowerment' lead to their belief that their participation in the project activities was a favor done to the development agency. They highlighted money as an essential need in their practical lives and a source of power. In coming to the meetings whilst overcoming the hindrances put in their way, they saw money (rent) as an incentive to it; the organizations gets something, they get something. Their time is reciprocated in kind by the NGO, who in their opinion, have the finances to do it.

Rent's literal dictionary meaning is a payment made for the use of a property, equipment or service. For the women to call it rent implies that their services have been utilized by the organization for their own purposes and the money is a payment made in return. Therefore, it can be extrapolated that it is the women's awareness that leads to their demand for rent. They know their time is literally precious, taken out of busy schedules, and this makes it their right to be availed. Rowlands (1997) stated when questioning empowerment: it takes at least a minimum sense of self-worth and self-confidence for someone to state that their time and effort is worth payment – conditioning their involvement.

In addition to rent, the local women also perceived that their involvement would be reciprocated by provision of groceries in Ramzan or if not that, then at least the provision of quality food as refreshments to show respect to the women for their provision of time.

Eventually, this 'concept of self' came to include a sense of being able to take responsibility for what happens and making the decision to act. In this case, the women from Dhoke

Khabba demanded rent, groceries and refreshments as 'pre-requisites' for their involvement in the project, after they analyzed the situation – the project needed participants and in attending the meetings, they were the ones in power because if all of them were absent in the next meeting, it would be a futile exercise.

Hence, the women's manipulation at this stage of the interaction consisted of empowerment being seen as a process of negotiation, where they achieved the most positive outcomes possible – for themselves – from situations not of their own making i.e. the activities of Aawaz. In this respect, they are practicing empowerment at a relational and collective level (Rowlands, 1997), where they have developed the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of their relationship and interaction with the NGO and decisions made within it.

6.5.3 Existence of a power and interaction hierarchy

Analysis of data on financial assistance also revealed a difference in perspectives on different levels about what the money involved symbolized – a motive, an aid and a hindrance.

The context of empowerment being exercised in the rhetoric of development is normally set by indicators decided by professionals. They believe that the people's own assessments could only be simple and qualitative which could not be aggregated to know the level of success and that local staff have to facilitate analysis in providing this data. (Jupp & Ali, 2010) In this respect, the authors are right in summarizing how empowerment is operationalized and their evaluation is applicable to Aawaz in its entirety.

This analysis shows that in the operationalization of the project, there exist three different levels of interaction: first, that of the data input and planning at AF where the perception of the members is aligned with the programming of the project. Second, that of the carrying out of activities by AWF (the members, while being part of the development team, living in the area surrounding the locale) and their resulting interaction with the women every day. This lead to their own perception where they sympathize with the women but have to keep a balance between project programming and keeping their relations with the women

intact. And third, that of the local women, who interact with both the organizations keeping in mind the realities and practicality of their lives and handle the situations accordingly.

This hierarchy constructs the symbolic nature of empowerment on the platform of Aawaz where at each level, the individuals see women's empowerment from their respective lens. Amongst the three levels identified, the views of the members at AF (consortium partner) were closest to 'empowerment' as theorized in the project programming while that of the local women represented empowerment being exercised at the ground level, albeit outside the parameters defined by the project. In addition, these women were very aware of the difference between them and the women from the organizations, and didn't hesitate in justifying their actions through this reasoning.

6.5.4 Alternative pathways to empowerment

When analyzing how the women manipulated their interactions with the NGOs through Aawaz into benefiting themselves, it was apparent that women exercised power in many different ways, outside the goals of the project but within the opportunities provided by it.

Their exercise of the power yielded as attendees of the meetings that they believed couldn't prove to be a success without them has already been analyzed – demand for reciprocity in the shape of monetary help and groceries. They used the confidence they acquired from the meetings to not raise their voices against violence or for their rights – both of which they perceived to be impractical in the face of hindrances – but rather, to bargain with the NGO to get what they needed to fulfill their daily needs.

Further, the women came to the meetings not because they thought they needed awareness but because they were upholding the relations with the focal women and resource person. In a way, this is empowerment at the relational level because they know to uphold the relations amongst them by participating in the project.

Not only this, analysis of the case studies also exhibited that the women were capable of using the confidence acquired and mobility provided to them for their participation in the activities to make personal, independent choices as a struggle against the restrictions placed on them. Second, they had the awareness to exploit the NGO's pre-conceived notions of

woman as the weaker gender and therefore always in need of assistance against the abuse of power by men.

This awareness also extends to them voicing their demands in a formal, structured manner via written applications to the relevant organization (in this case, the NGOs) when they wished to apply for groceries in the month of Ramzan.

In accordance with the experience of empowerment elaborated upon by Rowlands (1997), the women also experience empowerment at a 'personal level' where in developing a sense of self, confidence and capacity, they achieve what is important to them. However, contrary to the second part of empowerment at this level, instead of undoing the effects of internalized opression, they find ways to exercise their power in their interaction with the NGOs keeping within their belief that empowerment as a phenomena was not applicable to them, due to cultural, social and religious norms and that their roles as mothers and wives were of the highest priority rather than their own rights as women.

6.5.5 From interaction to consummation

As can be seen from the detailed analysis of women's avenues of 'manipulation' where they re-asses their interaction with the NGOs in accordance with their perceptions about empowerment, the women's prior experience of interaction with the NGOs gave them the power of knowledge from experience and they didn't hesitate to utilize it for their own benefit.

Due to the routinization of the NGO atmosphere in Dhoke Khabba, there exists a strong donation culture and an attitude of dependency with low volunteerism in the area. This lead to the absence of immediate benefits in the lives of the women except for resolution of issues, awareness and information sharing but only applicable to the women who have openly embraced it and used it to be empowered.

The active push back by the women, in setting conditions for their involvement, blurred the line between monetary help and awareness/discussions in empowering women through Aawaz. However, this is not to say that the project didn't benefit any women through its goals or didn't have success stories. Benefits acquired, hindrances faced and thus the

contrast between ‘empowerment’ achieved through Aawaz and that of empowerment perceived and exercised by women amalgamates into consummation, which is the objective of the next chapter.

7. CONSUMMATION – ACHIEVEMENT OF PLANNED GOAL

The last stage in Mead's four stages of act is that of consummation – which signifies the end of the act, when the planned goal is achieved. (Charon, 2011, p.22) I have applied this to my own research findings in showcasing how, as a result of the symbolic interaction between the stakeholders in Aawaz, empowerment has been achieved keeping the planned goal of the project in mind.

The chapter starts with empowerment achieved through the platform of Aawaz; highlighting success stories and positive influence from the existence of the project. Then it moves on to challenges faced (as observed through participant observation and from conversations) by outlining the hindrances project faced in the locale, to garner an analysis on the difficulty of sustaining empowerment achieved. Finally, an analysis is provided on empowerment acquired through the project versus the power yielded by local women in Dhoke Khabba who may or may not have been a part of the project.

7.1 Empowerment achieved through Aawaz

Aawaz programme has provided many women the opportunity to move physically out of their domestic spheres, into the wider world as empowered women – both politically and individually. Amongst these, success stories of women from Dhoke Khabba – as narrated by themselves in interviews - are exhibited in the section below.

7.1.1 Success stories

7.1.1.1 Dilshaad – Female Councillor UC 44

I encountered Dilshaad several times during the course of my research as in addition to being a regular member of the meetings conducted, member of Aawaz District Forum and on good terms with the team of Ahsas Welfare Foundation, she was also the local focal person and liaison between participants from Dhoke Khabba and the NGO.

She was married but separated from her husband, and after marrying off her two children, she was currently living with her aunt and sister in Dhoke Khabba, and performing her

duties as the councillor UC 44. In her interview, she explained how Aawaz helped her gain confidence in spite of her difficult life at the hands of her in-laws:

“My in-laws have been very cruel and I have been through a lot and I have come out stronger. I have been beaten when I was a housewife. My mother in law and husband used to beat me. My first son was still-born, nobody felt sorry for me. When my second son was born, my husband pushed me so hard that I fell to the floor, and I still had stitches from child birth at the time. I didn’t even know who lived outside the walls of the house. I now think that I was so stupid. I went through it all without saying anything. My younger sister had a lot of proposals but she saw what I was going through and refused them all. She was affected by my life. When you go to meetings and talk to the women then you get courage. Sometimes, for women, it’s enough that there are other women there to listen. Their weight is lifted and it is easier for them to get rid of their problems. Plus when we see other women’s problems, we feel that ours is smaller and morale raises.”

This feeling of having a support group and discussing each other’s problems, and the possibility of coming up with a solution here signifies power in the form of a group, where each isolated woman struggling in her own home is powerless, together, they become powerful through realization that their problems are shared problems. She became a councillor before becoming a part of Aawaz, but it helped her gain confidence and know her rights as a woman:

“Some of the people from neighborhood approached me for the seat of female councillor and said they will vote for me. I told them that I had never even gone out of the house and I lived with my mother, not my husband but then I thought I should try it. I have nothing to lose. People did talk a lot but as long as my family supported me, I was confident. Even after I was a counsellor, I listened to a lot of blames but then I became a part of Aawaz as I already was a part of many projects by AF before. I think I am the one who got the most opportunities through Aawaz as I became more confident and knew my rights. At first, I was afraid of chair men but now they are afraid of me. *laughs* There was an election among the women for speaker and vice speaker and they made me speaker for the Aawaz women assembly. I feel happy and proud.”

As she became a speaker for Aawaz district level women assembly (not at village level, so not included in the research), it can be seen that she availed the opportunities and platform provided to her. Her confidence level rose when she became a speaker and was elected through elections. She found a difference in herself being a councilor before and after becoming a speaker. Further, she narrated issues that have been resolved in the area through Aawaz platform whilst she has been a part:

"Men in the area don't know about what is going on in the area and the issues of women. Women come to me with their issues instead of going to the centre directly. There were garbage cans placed in the area when women raised the issue of cleanliness. One woman was burnt by her husband when he threw acid on her. They said the women did suicide but the children told other women in the area and when I found out, I brought the case forward. Her husband was punished but then he was released because of his children that he had to take care of and the family forgave him.

Therefore, by becoming the local spokesperson for the women and the liaison between them and the agency, she was becoming the voice of other women as well. A woman understands the needs of her fellow women better than men – like she opined herself. However, it can be seen from the anecdote she provided that even bringing justice to women through the platform becomes difficult due to societal pressures and responsibilities whereupon the husband was 'forgiven' because of his children.

Dilshaad availed the opportunities provided to her by Aawaz and not only raised her own voice but became the voice for other women in the area by becoming the speaker for women's assembly. As per the goals of the project, she was politically empowered and on an individual level, became confident and more aware of her and her fellow women's rights.

7.1.1.2 Laiba – President Aawaz District Forum

Also residing in Dhoke Khabba, Laiba was one of the beneficiaries of Aawaz who was first a member of Village Forum, and then climbed the ranks within the project which she had been associated with since the beginning. Like Dilshaad, she was also a beneficiary of other projects by Aawaz and through the awareness she achieved through them and Aawaz, she

changed her perspective on life and opened a primary level school in the vicinity with her husband. She had done Masters and was mother to a son and three young daughters. She explained that she was a part of many projects before Aawaz but she was proud of her achievements with this platform:

"I was first a part of WELI (Women economic leadership initiative) project, then an SPO training on women's empowerment. Right after, Aawaz started. I became the village forum member, then I got more confidence, then became a part of UC forum, then I became a member of ADF and it was election time. There were 7 seats for which there was contestation. I contested with heavy personalities with experience but I won since then I have been working at district level. This was an election, not selection so I am proud that women put their confidence in me."

She already had many other opportunities to avail knowledge and become aware about her rights and women's empowerment in general, however, she was proud of the fact that she had confidence and skill to impress other women enough to convince them to vote for her. She added that through Aawaz, she has benefited personally by becoming even more aware:

"Personally, my sense of responsibility has increased. At home, my focus was on my son, not my daughters. Like is common in our society, I used to favor my son more and neglected my daughters. After the Aawaz trainings on '*Jamhuriat Aangan se Awan Tak'* (Democracy from starts from home), I realized my mistake. Before, I used to take my son to get his glasses made from the best shops and to the best doctor however high the fees was. While I took my daughters to small cheaper shops. After training I realized this is injustice I still remember that my husband and I broke those glasses. Now we take them all to one place. This was a huge change that will stay with me for the rest of my life. So there can be discrimination in motherhood as well. And I was very successful in removing it.

Therefore, she became aware of the discrimination she was becoming a part of, in passively socializing her daughters that they were 'lesser' than their brother and brought about a positive change in her life through awareness raised by the project training. Laiba also

shared the harsh realities of her life whilst being an empowered woman and how she got to the place where she could apply what she learnt at the meetings:

"My marriage was arranged. My husband was very strict and made me stop the job I was doing when my first baby was born. I didn't oppose. When I realized that he won't let me do a job, I decided to support him instead. He had an academy, I said we should open a school. I had more experience than him. When you totally oppose the men, then it is hard. You have to compromise. We couldn't even afford cleaning staff and I said that I will do the cleaning of the school. I used to come along with my babies. My in-laws said that if she is going, then she must take the children with her. Whatever the season, I took my children. I also had to fulfill my responsibilities at home. In-laws had demanded that weekly, there should be 10 suits washed and ironed for them. This was my job. I used to have only one day to do it (Sunday) but I did it. Then I was rewarded for it as well because the very same in-laws now respect me. The change came slowly. First, I had to compromise and bear the unfairness. I was already in the process of doing this before Aawaz started but because of this, I was able to apply what I learnt and got the courage from other women."

Her marriage into a patriarchal family was a huge hindrance to her thirst for empowerment as she was an educated woman and was tied down by responsibilities and obligations as a wife and mother. However, she slowly brought a change in her situation and gained power within the household and outside of it through persistence and intelligent decisions at the right time. In this instance, her education and intelligence became her strength but Aawaz provided her with a stepping stone with which she nipped the starting of her own discriminatory socialization in the bud whilst providing her with a support mechanism which gave her courage to do the right thing.

7.1.1.3 Nazreen – Focal Person Dhoke Khabba

Nazreen was one of the women who were regular participants of the meetings and study circles conducted and found out about the project through the female councillor. She was a widow, made her living as a seamstress and was mother to a son and two daughters, one of whom was married. She stated that she became a better person after being a part of the project and used the awareness she got to help other women:

“They opened my mind and showed me that we shouldn’t be quiet when someone is being cruel. I always believed that there shouldn’t be cruelty but now I also believe that you should raise the voice for your right. You shouldn’t stay quiet, as you are equally to blame if you do. I used this awareness several times. I know how to speak for my right and how to raise awareness in other people. Everyone now knows me, they tell me their issues and then I call them to the meetings and discuss it there. My upstairs neighbors are a Christian family. The husband married again and didn’t treat his wife and children right. She told me about it and I mentioned it at the meetings. Then they talked to the relatives that it’s in your religion that you can’t have two wives at the same time. The husband gave divorce to second wife and now the wife is happy. She even gave birth to a son recently.”

While she narrated two other anecdotes as examples of her own empowerment through raising a voice for other women on Aawaz’s platform as the local focal person, she added that it was more difficult to do practically than one can imagine, as there are many other factors involved:

“There was a man in the neighborhood who used to do drugs and hit his wife. His family wasn’t cooperating at all after I raised voice at the meetings. The wife told me to leave it and kept going back to him after he hit her so we couldn’t help her. Then there was another man who married again and she (my friend) wasn’t treated right. This case went to the court where it was won. Her husband got her a house, gives her monthly expenditure but he has married the third time. He says that I can do it – I earn enough to look after all of them and it is allowed in our religion so no one can stop me.”

Therefore, while she has been empowered enough to raise her voice for other women, the inhibiting factors discussed in the fifth chapter hinder her attempts at dispute resolution. In addition to the justification given through religion and men being able to do what they want with their patriarchal power, it is also important for the women themselves to want to be helped.

Nazreen was made aware though her participation in Aawaz and even though she faced hindrances, she acquired the confidence and knowledge that would stay with her. She aided the project outputs of dispute resolution and was one of the women the project mobilized to raise voice – both for herself if the opportunity arose and for other women.

7.1.1.4 Irum – Resource Person UC 44

My interaction with Irum continued throughout the course of my field work, as she was my key informant and helped me build a rapport among the local women by accompanying me to their houses at the start. She earned as a seamstress as well as through her job as a resource person and a member of AWF. Through her earning, she supported her family – husband, mother-in-law and three children while her husband worked in a shoe shop. She shared that she wasn't much different from the rest of the women in Dhoke Khabba but being a part of the project changed her in a positive manner:

"A few years ago, I never stepped outside the house or even saw the market. All my shopping was done by my cousins, sisters or mother-in-law. I stitched even before marriage as well but didn't step outside. When I did go out once or twice, where I saw there was a crowded area, I avoided it. Then my sister introduced me to members of Ahsas Welfare Foundation and I even participated in some rallies and events. I was hesitant to become a resource person of such a big project, as already people in neighborhood were saying to my husband that it wasn't a good thing for a woman to be outside her home. My husband supported me and I made the decision. In these 2 years, I have grown as a person and have given myself morale. Now I go to the locale alone, use local transport alone and the project team supported and encouraged me. I used to not be able to talk without hesitating, as I never used to go outside. I used to be so quiet and now I can at least speak my mind. I haven't transferred my initial weakness to my daughters who now even bring grocery."

Stepping into the public sphere and taking up responsibility was a source of empowerment for her, where, as a resource person, she built her personality into a more confident version of herself. She shared that it was made easier because she was surrounded by people who encouraged her:

"My husband as well as my mother-in-law is very supportive, who even goes out to the market with me. I also owe it to my sister who introduced me to the project and the opportunity. I am very happy when I spend my own earnings. I even paid for my own delivery cost."

She was given an opportunity and she utilized that in a sustainable way to become personally empowered and fulfill her everyday needs. She was empowered through the project but it was also her personal zeal. She was different from other women in the area because she made an effort and became a part of the team working to mobilize women, feeling empowered by increasing her mobility, accepting responsibility and being financially independent through the opportunities provided to her by Aawaz.

7.1.2 Positive influence of the project: benefits and advantages

Analysis of the data shows that Aawaz – as a project working to politically empower women whilst resolving disputes and mobilizing them to raise their voices for accountability – had a positive influence on the local community by:

- Providing a platform to bring their issues faced every day and possibility of getting them resolved by contacting the local councillor or relevant organization
- Providing a place to get information about and learn the processes of different laws, CNIC and birth registration and other services offered by government like BISP
- Providing a safe space for women to talk about their issues and be listened to, allowing them to have emotional and psychological comfort in knowing that they are not alone
- Mobilizing the women to raise their voice when they found out or observed disputes or injustice being done
- Generating an open discussion through the awareness sessions and meetings and allowing them to apply what is learnt in their own lives
- Giving the women confidence through their participation in the project at different levels and raising it by allowing political processes within the project like election and positions of responsibility
- Acting as an aid and building upon the desire in women to bring about change in themselves and other people around them

The positive influence of the project cannot be denied. However, these benefits need to be analyzed whilst keeping in mind the perceptions of the women themselves when it comes to empowerment. Simply stated, the positive influence is subject to the lived experiences

of each women who were or still are a beneficiary of the project, which in turn shaped their interaction.

While it impacted many women positively, the consummation of the goal was not easy. The project faced many challenges through its operationalization in Dhoke Khabba, the analysis of which provides a contextual lens to sustaining 'empowerment' at the local level.

7.2 Sustaining empowerment – hindrances and challenges

When analyzing the challenges faced in sustaining 'empowerment' on the local level, it is necessary to enlist the hindrances and issues that were experienced, discovered both through observation and the opinions offered by the respondents during in-depth and conversational interviews.

7.2.1 Break from project closing down

It has already been mentioned in the fourth chapter (impulse) that the project shut down for a few months at the start of 2017 and re-started in April, when this research was conducted.

When the project shut down, the Agahi centres were also closed during that time and the resource person was not available. Since there was no one to record the issues or assistance that people may have brought, there was no documentation on the outputs. In addition to that, during the meetings conducted when it re-started, the women had to be reminded of all they had learnt in the activities conducted before the three month break. It was not possible to go into the details of all the previous meetings, so this hindered the process of awareness. In one of the meetings, when they were asked about harassment laws, the women were silent and one whispered to another: "It has been such a long time, how can we remember what we heard months ago?"

Not only was this a difficulty faced in continuity of the learning and awareness but also lead to reluctance on part of the women to participate again, as it was observed that when the resource person was making calls to the regular participants, they were hesitant and making excuses. This was also opined by the district coordinator of the project: "Now,

women are a little reluctant but at first, they were very motivated and enthusiastically took part in activities."

The challenge that was faced was that when the momentum of the project broke, the process of gradual 'empowerment' that was taking place came to a stop. Due to the reluctance on part of the women to join again, it was difficult to start where it left off and posed a question mark on the continuity and sustainability of the project itself.

7.2.2 Reputation of NGOs in the locale

The respondents associated with the project as resource persons and focal persons disclosed that the reputation of NGOs in the area is not good, which is why it is not considered right for a woman to be associating herself with a project or be seen going to the offices of the organization. When she became a part of Aawaz, Irum (resource person UC 44) had to face a lot of talk:

"The shopkeepers here in the area told my husband that you don't know what happens in these NGOs – they are people with very open minds and don't have respect for local people."

Another woman – a local beneficiary and a housewife – shared:

"Yahan tou sab ka yehi khayal hai k ye NGO walay apne kaam se atay hain aur ker k chalay jatay hain project waghera. Hamara tou waqt he zaya hota hai" meaning "Everyone here thinks that these NGO people come for their own work and go back after doing some project. It's a waste of time for us."

The general perception is that NGOs are an 'external influence' and 'people from the outside' who come for their own purpose, rather than to help, and therefore don't have respect for the local customs. The challenge then the project faced was working in an environment where its negative reputation preceded it and had to convince women to participate in the activities which were being conducted for their benefit and awareness. However, this major barrier also lead to women deciding not to be a part anymore (as

analyzed in chapter 6) as their honor was also attached to the circumstances of their mobility in the public sphere and this reputation was adversely affecting their lives.

7.2.3 Mindset of men

Upon reaching the locale on my very first day, I was told that it will be difficult for me to include men as respondents in my research (elaborated upon in chapter 3) and the same hindrance was told by the members of AWF when they conducted the study circles. The resource person shared:

"We can't go into the field alone – we have to take a male with us. Sometimes men come and disturb the meeting and say that leave this place, what is your purpose here and our meetings are then cancelled."

Even while conducting these meetings, they faced hindrance because of the men, as shared by a male team member:

"Women are not allowed to talk in front of their men and have restrictions on who is coming and going out of their houses. When we conduct the activities, we face resistance. They say that this may be the time when our men come home and we cannot talk right now. They are not able to give us so much time."

Therefore, men don't appreciate their homes being the space utilized for the meetings and women face problems when they agree to hosting the study circles. This was not only the case with the beneficiaries, rather, another local resource person that I conversationally interviewed shared:

"Before, my husband was okay that I would sit in the office and deal mostly with ladies but then slowly, they asked us to go to door to door, then he didn't like it. Even my brother didn't like it. *Wo kehte hain acha nai lagta. Achay se acha banda bhi ghar ghar janay ki ijazat nai dega, izzat ka mamla hota hai* (They say it doesn't look good. The best of a person wouldn't allow going house to house, it's about honor)"

The project was also hindered at the 'middle level' by the men not liking the mobility exercised by women as part of the project team. In addition to them explicitly hindering

the activities, they also acted as an implicit hindrance when the meetings were at the centre, due to their lack of empathy with the issues faced by women. A woman shared with regard to the male members of AWF conducting the meetings:

"*Unko ehsas nai hota* (they don't empathize) he thinks that when women come, they are free but we can only come for one or two hours. We have dozens of other work to do when we get home. When he goes back home from here, he won't have to do anything else except watch TV and eat dinner prepared by his wife."

While the men associated with the project were seen to be disregarding the women's responsibilities at home when they demanded more of their time, men in the locale considered these responsibilities of utmost importance and see the project as making things difficult. Jamshed, a local business man opined:

"Well, for a woman, her first priority is her home which includes her children and her husband. So the project should be about teaching sewing which they can do inside the house easily, or tutoring the children. It will be better than going outside the house to the offices (of NGO)"

Therefore, the men were not comfortable with the prospect of women increased mobility in the public sphere due to which their household responsibilities may be affected. This mindset has a direct relation with women not being able to participate in the project as the males in their family don't appreciate it. Not only this, the mindset of men – promoting patriarchal values – was also experienced by one of the women when she reported her husband's domestic abuse to the police. She was told:

"This is not America, this is Pakistan. *Yahan mard ki hukmrani chalti hai, aurton ki nahe* (Here, men are in-charge, not women) Listen to your husband and live quietly."

Thus, even if the women attempt to resolve the disputes after learning of the processes (as intended by the project) she faces resistance from the institutions themselves where patriarchy is entrenched. This then becomes a major obstacle to the sustainability of project's attempt at 'empowerment'.

During project implementation, it was also difficult to convince men to join the meetings as they were not conducted just for the women. During one of the meetings, when inquired about how to engage the men in the community, the women couldn't come up with any ideas and declared it impossible. As per my observation, when they did join the meetings, the discussion that ensued turned into an argument where they defended the males doing domestic abuse and re-marrying with permission of first wife, rendering the objective of the meetings futile. One young male retorted:

"Well, it is the women's fault. Why don't they speak up when they are being beaten? Why do they go through it and not leave their husbands? And why do they give husbands permission to marry again, why don't they raise voice? It's all their own fault, if you think about it."

While the incident made it hard for me as a researcher to remain objective, I reminded myself that such opinions were inevitable when interacting with males in a patriarchal society. Therefore, I did not respond in kind, as a participant of the meeting, and observed that it revealed the attitude of the males that women confronted on a daily basis. While a woman may not speak up against domestic abuse and give permission for re-marrying because of her dependence on the male, protection of her honor and future of her children, the males – from their position of ascribed power – may not understand what the women are going through, even whilst being a part of a project aimed to help the women.

Thus, the challenge faced by the project was that of empowering women whilst facing hindrances from men due to their mindset. From not allowing meetings to be conducted to not being able to empathize with women's lives to perceiving the project as a deterrent to woman's first priority of household responsibilities to patriarchal mindset hindering dispute resolution, men served as a challenge in not only allowing 'empowerment' to happen but sustaining it.

7.2.4 Mindset of women

This factor has already been discussed in detail in chapter 5, under the umbrella of the women's perception of empowerment and how it cannot be achieved but it needs to be

discussed within the parameters of hindering the project as well. It has already been established that women stopped coming to meetings because they prioritized their homes, families and honor. In addition to that, their socialization didn't allow them to see beyond their gender roles and insist that they had to compromise. Kiran, a housewife and mother of two daughters opined on the domestic abuse her neighbor was facing by her husband:

"Be patient and compromise because nothing goes forward without compromise with husband and family. The more she writes applications or creates a scene, the worse it will be for her because her husband will leave her and she will be out on the streets with nowhere to go. At least he gives the expenditure right now. What more can a woman ask for? There are women out there who are worse off than her."

This hindered the project's goal of empowering the women to resolve disputes themselves and raise their voices in the process. The dependence of a woman on her husband for food, clothes and shelter was put forward as the reasoning why she shouldn't 'create a scene' by raising her voice. This mindset ingrained into the women from day one by older women don't allow a change to happen even with initiatives like Aawaz. Another woman casually remarked during a meeting conducted:

"Ham sab mantay hain mard k niche ghulami tou hamesha rahegi, tou faida?" meaning "We all admit that we will always remain the servants of men, then what is the use?"

This was the opinion of a majority of the local women I interviewed (as has been exhibited in chapter 5 in detail) This mindset didn't allow the women to take the project as a positive or practical addition to their lives, let alone listen attentively at the meetings and implement it in their lives.

Thus Aawaz experienced a challenge in implementation at the ground level because the mindset of the women themselves – as a result of socialization – was an obstacle to their 'empowerment'. They either stopped participating, or didn't believe they could be empowered. In order to be effective, this mindset first needed to be changed, and then the project activities would have a positive influence as these women were the ones on whom the project depended on for sustainability.

7.2.5 Not ready to take action

This hindrance is in relation to the one discussed above, as the project team shared that women are not ready to take the next steps in sustaining their 'empowerment'. The resource person shared:

"Women talk about the issues but are not ready to give application or issue official report as evidence so I can't take it forward and can't give a solution. The have issues but won't speak up or file a complaint."

This was in line with my own observation as one of my respondents – a victim of domestic abuse – didn't want a divorce from her husband because of her children and thus didn't think it was a matter to be shared at the meetings. Yet another woman shared that men in her family didn't allow a divorce because it was a matter of honor:

"When, after a fight, my husband said I will give her divorce, I won't keep her. My father said that don't mention divorce in front of me ever because it is a *gaali* (abuse) It is very wrong and don't speak of it again."

So divorce – one of the mechanisms of dispute resolution and empowering women to raise a voice – is a cultural taboo in its connection to honor. Other respondents insisted on the issues being 'family matters' and not for the public's ears as it becomes a matter of honor in society. One of them, a housewife whose daughter was victim of domestic abuse, stated:

"No, I didn't share in meetings because I didn't want that anyone else listen to a private matter. *Ghar ki baat parday mein he band hojae tou acha hai* (Household issues should stay behind the curtain) People talk and say ten things about the matter and then it's about honor."

In addition to the women seeing their issues as belonging in the domestic sphere rather than being solved in the public sphere, they also stayed quiet due to the repercussions in spite of being aware of the existing laws that they learnt at the meetings. The local focal person shared:

"Women get silent due to their *izzat* (honor) in spite of the harassment law existing and them knowing about it. Some don't even want to register the case because everyone will find out and talk."

The women stayed silent not only on everyday basis but also in the activities conducted to allow them to hold the government accountable for the service delivery. Members of AWF confided that it was difficult to make the women be vocal especially because they might get in trouble for it. They told about an incident at *khuli kacheri* (open court) organized by Aawaz where when talking about drug problems in UC 44, the men present asked who told you, tell us the name of the women and where she lives. So the women were scared of giving information or raising voice lest they get into even bigger trouble with husbands because of it, or worse.

Therefore, in the face of this hindrance where the women were not vocal because it was associated with their honor, their issues belonged in the domestic sphere, resolving mechanisms as cultural taboo and them facing consequences of raising voice, it was challenging for the project to empower women while their hands were tied in so many ways. Until the women gathered up the courage to become that outspoken, take the risk of her family life being affected and her actions not be associated with the family's honor, it would not be possible to sustain 'empowerment' even within the encouraging environment of so many NGOs in the area willing to help them and working for women's rights and awareness, like Aawaz.

7.2.6 Dependence on Agahi Centre

According to the members of Aawaz interacting with the women, they only want immediate benefit at their convenience rather than working for it. One of them complained:

"They want money just by sitting at home. They think it's an NGO and it will just give them money in way of help. They should do the effort themselves. At least try."

In addition to the women wanting financial assistance while sitting at home, they also want their issues resolved whilst sitting at home. The forums were created and their purpose was to empower women to an extent they would be able to raise their voices and know which

institutions to go to with the applications. This was far from reality as in one of the meetings, when asked about the institutions that they would have to take their applications to, the women were silent. It was evident that the women were still dependent on the Agahi center for the resolving of issues rather than taking a stand themselves, which was one of the objectives of the project. Even when they did try, they didn't succeed, as one of the beneficiaries shared:

"We have been facing water shortage. I went to the office of the UC but they said that the water isn't available and they can't do anything. We don't sleep all night and sometimes they open the water at 3 am or 1 am. They don't listen to us so I have to tell at the meeting so someone else takes a step."

So the women couldn't hold the authorities accountable by themselves, without the NGO behind them. Some of them stated that they didn't know the process nor did they have the free time to go to these organizations responsible. Not only this, as exhibited in the previous chapter, the issues brought up at the meetings revolved around the everyday issues like water, gas, groceries rather than the actual services to be emphasized as part of the project : health and education.

Therefore, it was huge challenge faced by the project as women's dependence on the centre allowed them to perceive that their involvement stopped after talking about an issue or giving an application. In addition, their perception of NGOs having money lead to the financial dependency without working themselves. The sustainability of the 'empowerment' was questionable after the project stopped working in the area, as the women – especially housewives - weren't mobilized to the extent that they would be able to take the matters into their own hands.

7.2.7 Project hierarchy

In some instances, the hierarchy maintained within the project itself posed as a hindrance to its implementation. These findings were subject to my own analysis as a participant observer. There were three levels of hierarchy: top level was Aurat Foundation (AF); middle level was Ahsas Welfare Foundation (AWF) housing the Agahi centre and resource

person, councillors and other empowered women part of Aawaz District Forum (ADF); last level was the village level participants or beneficiaries i.e. the local women.

In one of the meetings when the women were asked about their issues, the focal person and female councillor of UC 44 (Dilshaad) argued with them over which jurisdiction their complaint was supposed to be launched in, taking the complaints personally. This lead to a very charged atmosphere where the women who had spoken up were silenced awkwardly. The incident could easily be the source of demotivation for the women who had been participants of the meeting, where they felt that their voices were being trodden upon by those in power. In this case, the female councillor whose individual empowerment was at the expense of collective empowerment of other women as a group.

Another incident whilst arranging meetings at the resource centre revealed that there were administrative and communication issues existing between the AF and AWF (Agahi centre) as there was no schedule kept in conducting the meetings and the role of the resource person was not clarified. She was held accountable both in front of the upper level (AF) and lower level (local women) in terms of inviting the women for meetings, dealing with their demand for rent and providing the relevant documentation to the upper level like attendance sheet etc. but she didn't understand nor was explained to, the details of the project other than the outputs. The miscommunication lead to a distance which resulted in lack of motivation on part of the team at grass roots to work hard.

In addition to that, the forms provided to the resource persons as data collection tools were difficult to understand at the middle level, who were clearly not that educated. While at the lower level, women didn't know the details of which forum they belonged to, and the details of the outputs because even during the meetings, it was jargon used that they didn't understand.

This gap existing between women and the organization as well as the upper and middle levels of the organization itself posed as a hindrance when it came to effective conduction of meetings and mistrust between the stakeholders involved. Therefore, it was a challenge for the goal to be achieved while the gaps existing lead to ineffective utilization of resources at all levels.

Apart from the project hierarchy, it can be seen that the hindrances posing as a challenge to the project also arose from the same contextual inhibiting factors that had been identified by the women as hindrances to their empowerment and why it wasn't achievable in their lived realities (exhibited in chapter 5): protection of honor, patriarchy ascribing men with power, women's socialization into gendered roles etc. The perception of women about the practicality of their 'empowerment' also amalgamated into hindering the project as their interaction with the NGO was shaped by them prioritizing their personal lives over taking action. This, complemented by the project closing down and the repute of NGOs in the area, lead to a major challenge for sustaining 'empowerment' brought about by Aawaz on a larger level.

7.3 Discussion and Analysis

With this chapter, findings on the 'symbolic' interaction of the local women with the development agency for the purpose of their empowerment come to a close. In highlighting the success stories of the project and the challenges faced in sustaining 'empowerment', it was intended to provide a justified, contextual picture of what the project has achieved and the role it has played in affecting women's lives within the locale.

Since the consummation of the project was directly related with the impulse, perception and manipulation stages, the previously discussed categories of analysis need to be kept in mind when discussing and analyzing this stage of completion.

7.3.1 Determinants of women's empowerment – women's situation

It has been established by now that every woman perceives her empowerment in an individual way, shaped by her own history and circumstances and acts accordingly. Drawing from women's perceptions discussed in chapter five, it can be deduced that their practical experiences with attempting to exercise power and failure in doing so lead to a fixed mindset which determined the extent of their empowerment being a part of the project.

Development agencies often supply images of subjects who are able to choose, make and shape their own lives. In reality, very few have the capacity to make independent choices

and follow them through. (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010) Following this line of thought, women's practical experiences allowed them to identify structures of constraint to their power and choice in how to live their lives.

In the success stories exhibited, the women who became empowered through availing the opportunities provided by Aawaz and building their personalities, it should be taken into account that they were aided by favorable circumstances. They either didn't live with their husbands so had the power to make independent decisions (Dilshaad and Nazreen), or had supportive husbands who gave their wives space to become better versions of themselves.

Also, their personalities allowed them to 'want' to be empowered, like really listen to the trainings and apply them to their lives (Laiba) or be courageous enough to take up responsibility (Irum) and the same cannot be said for the rest of the women in Dhoke Khabba. Like Dilshaad was already comfortable with being in the public sphere as a councillor and her personality allowed her to become one, thereafter she didn't find that going to the Agahi centre was inconvenient. On the other hand, most of the women in Dhoke Khabba had restricted mobility. It is important to mention that they even were more comfortable with FGDs conducted at their homes rather than at the centre, which was in the public sphere.

In patriarchal contexts, tight controls are exerted on women in every sphere of their lives: their free movement, their voice in family affairs, their economic independence and their relations with their husbands (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). This is in line with the findings of my research, as patriarchy and men's power in this context have been identified as a contextual inhibiting factor when the women identified hindrances to their empowerment.

However, this and other inhibiting factors like honor and gendered roles also had a consequence in determining how far the women could be empowered by the project as the women weren't ready to take action to protect honor, or being tied down by responsibilities. The threat of intervention by the men, threat of removal of access to children and even the threat of withdrawing maintenance are effective because of the dependence of women. (Jeffery, 1979) In a position of subordination and dependence, it was then difficult for the

women to bring change in one aspect of their lives – through the project – without having inevitable repercussions in other aspects of their lives.

While some women made the decisions to stop participating in the project as a result of this reality, most of them didn't attempt to empower themselves in fear of this reality. As per the gendered roles prescribed to them by the patriarchal culture of Pakistani society, these women made their lives about looking after the house, their children and their husbands. This thinking was reinforced by religious beliefs that a woman's place was inside the home i.e. the domestic sphere. Not only did they not feel the need to be made aware, they were living in their bubbles of domestic bliss which were hard to penetrate, living a sheltered life that need not be disturbed by impossible notions of power. Other housewives in the locale experienced so many household issues and worries that they don't have the time or energy to think about anything else other than running their households to the best of their abilities. In this situation, their perception of 'empowerment' was also that of unnecessary complication in the practicality of their lives.

In developing countries, the culture of female modesty, deference, obedience and self-sacrifice have defined women's lives for centuries and shouldn't be assumed to be incapable of constructing good and flourishing lives for the women. (Nussbaum, 2000 as cited by Mosedale, 2014) This stands true in the findings of this research, as several women's perception of their power residing in their homes was not an extraordinary occurrence, rather, it was acceptable and lead to their insistence that they were happy the way they are and didn't need 'empowerment' to change their lives for the better.

Similarly, every stakeholder involved in bringing about empowerment through Aawaz also had their own history, circumstance and in addition, knowledge banks acquired through their affiliation with the development agencies (like AF). Therefore, their perception of women's empowerment is inclined towards the project goals and its achievement through a pre-planned road of action. However, the individuals (especially women and members of grass root organization AWF) closer to the reality of lived experiences of beneficiaries or as partial beneficiaries, while believed in the possibility of 'empowerment', took a different route to how it should or could be achieved in spite of the hindrances. This gives a multi-

layered symbolic picture of empowerment perceived at three levels – upper, middle and lower.

7.3.2 Extent and shape of women's empowerment - domains of power

Data analysis of the perception and manipulation of the women show that these local women yield power within the opportunities provided to them and in their lives in the domestic spheres, keeping their situations in mind. Each individual woman's ideas and actions change the shape and extent of power exercised by her and the research reveals that they do so at both domains available to them – that of the project and at home.

At the project level (as already analyzed in detail as alternative pathways in chapter 6) the women readily engage in processes of empowerment that fulfill their everyday needs like writing applications for grocery and exploit their power as participants in demanding reciprocity in the shape of rent and groceries.

NGO membership allows women to take up informal economic activities which are easier to reconcile with domestic responsibilities. (Kabeer et al., 2011) However, according to the findings of my research, in addition to already engaging in informal economic activity of stitching at home, the women exploit and manipulate the NGOs into provisions of economic gains, even going as far as to exploit their own gender in the offices where they know they will be perceived as the oppressed. This exercise of power at the project level is a result of their prioritization of basic needs above awareness or fulfillment of rights. This lead to their increased dependency on the structures created by the project for their awareness, like the Agahi centre, but with no extended plan of action for when the project ended. Living in the vicinity of the NGOs, their perception was shaped by the fact that when one project ended, another would start.

This also highlights the difference between the project perception and the local women's perception of empowerment as the goal of the project was to empower women at community level through knowledge sharing and mobilizing them to raise their voices and solve their issues i.e. 'empowerment' on basis of knowledge. However, this knowledge was seen differently by the women. For them, the knowledge of writing applications, when to come to a meeting where their participation would be financially reciprocated and where

to bring their issues was more important than knowledge about harassment laws, transgenders, identities and voting.

At personal level, women exercise power in the domestic sphere which, in their opinion, should be perceived as empowerment because they solved household issues on their own, had control over finances (few of them) and had mobility albeit restricted by permissions from their husbands or brothers. Other women exercised power yielded by their age, position in the household and their personalities allowing them to negotiate with their husbands. Other women believed that their power resided in them being good housewives which allowed them a position of responsibility – a symbol of power within the household.

7.3.3 Women's empowerment and development

The question then is whether the goal as intended by the project was achieved and the answer is that it was achieved. However, the impact was not to the extent that it could have been simply because of the differences in perception of empowerment by the women and the development agency which lead to a symbolic interaction between the two on the platform of Aawaz. This resulted in women using the opportunities provided for their own personal benefits which in itself is analyzed as exercise of power.

Analysis of the challenges faced due to the break in the project, reputation of the NGOs in the locale and the project hierarchy lead from contextual and power analysis into inspection of the rhetoric of development as these hindrances arose not 'because' or 'in the way of' the operationalization of the project but due to 'the way' it was put into practice. This is the reality of most women's empowerment projects in Pakistan aided by international agencies; while the intention is good, the planned objectives have been created externally and thus lose their essence when tried to be achieved at the grass roots level.

When women find their own voice, and their messages are communicated upward through the hierarchy, perhaps with help from researchers or planners, this leads to development of programs designed with and for women (Hanchett, 1997). This remains yet to be put into practice in Pakistan, as according to research findings, women in Dhoke Khabba found their voices but used those voices to negotiate with the NGOs and used their position at the bottom of the hierarchy as a source of their power. The project hierarchy was also rife with

miscommunication and organizational issues which then lessened the impact of the project rather than allowing the women's voices to reach the top level.

In Pakistan, development has been routinized, with no revolutionary spirit. This realization has also dawned upon the people who have been surrounded by the NGOs in the vicinity for as long as they can remember and their perception of these organizations is that of external interventions created for their own purpose. This reputation is also rooted in the 'difference' between 'us and them' where NGOs have the money and therefore should provide immediate material benefits rather than behavioral change advocacy or awareness raising through knowledge.

External interventions aimed at producing empowerment may fail to achieve the desired results because there is failure to understand the social dimensions of constraint as well as cultural limits of choice (Kabeer, 2008). This is in par with the findings of women's own perception of their empowerment (and challenges experienced) as the patriarchal culture, their prioritized roles as women, religious beliefs and cultural demand of protection of women proved to be the dimensions of constraints and limited their choices. Therefore, while the intervention failed to understand these, the women acted in accordance to their own needs and beliefs, either not participating or getting what use they could out of the opportunities provided by Aawaz. In the sphere of political empowerment, Siddiqui (2005) rightly stated that social norms in Pakistan do not question the voting right of women nor do they object to political representation of women. However, the intermediary stages of the political participation of women do not have the social legitimacy or the sanction of social norms. Aawaz intended to mobilize the women in these 'intermediary stages' and while the activities designed and programmed to achieve this were effective on paper, they were hindered by the perception of women for whom, the 'law of truth' imposed by these norms was what they had to abide by if they had to survive in the society they lived in.

Flexibility to women's needs and decision of the best way to combine empowerment and sustainability objectives can only be achieved on the basis of extensive consultation with the women, research on their needs, strategies and constraints, and a process of negotiation between women and development agencies (Mayoux, 2002). This participatory approach to development and empowerment is in dire need of being put into practice in Pakistan

because if the women's needs and their perceptions are not taken into account when designing and programming the projects, the sustainability of the empowerment that may have been achieved will be questionable, as can be seen by the local women's lack of motivation to take action and their dependency on the Agahi centre, rather than the sustained voice and accountability planned by the five year long project.

The very nature of empowerment is contextual and less predictable than the quick fit solutions put forth by development organizations, who simply use their position of power to forcefully implement the activities that have been planned. However, this doesn't mean that the women themselves are powerless and complacent. They push back within the constraints that are a part of their everyday lives and diverge into alternative pathways of empowerment – either on the project platform or in the domestic spheres. Thus, the resulting consummation is a mix of the impulse, perception and manipulation stages where empowerment becomes a different criterion of meaning for each of the individuals involved.

8. MODEL FORMULATION AND CONCLUSION

"I like the term empowerment because no one has defined it clearly as yet; so it gives us a breathing space to work it out in action terms before we have to pin ourselves down to what it means. I will continue using it until I am sure it does not describe what we are doing."[29]

As discussed in review of literature (chapter 2), published literary work on women's empowerment in Pakistan is abundantly empirical in nature, with few studies looking at it as a participatory evaluation. In addition, the existing frameworks cannot be applied to empowerment as a goal of the development interventions which attempt to bring about positive change in the lives of Pakistani women.

Therefore, I have devised a model based on my findings and analysis of the project outputs, perspectives of local women and members of NGOs implementing the project and the resulting symbolic interaction based on these perceptions. The first section of this chapter explains each level of the devised model and then a fusion of these levels showcases the model as a representation of empowerment perceived symbolically in this development project.

8.1 Individual levels of the empowerment model

This section explains the different levels of the perceived model of empowerment resulting from the symbolic interaction between the stakeholders of the project.

8.1.1 Upper level – Empowerment planned and documented

This perception of 'empowerment' is directly related to the planned goal, objectives or outputs and the programming of the project at the village level as well as the institutional framework put in place to operationalize the project outputs respectively. The designed data collection tools (forms) and the monitoring done was aligned with this perception of 'empowerment', which also shaped the opinions and language of those associated with the project at this level: members of the Aurat Foundation.

[29] Unidentified NGO activist quoted in Batliwala, 1993, p. 49 as cited by Rowlands, 1997, p. 129

At this level, to bring about women's empowerment, the focus was on their political empowerment by focusing on three outputs: women's political participation, conflict/dispute resolution and social services accountability with focus on health and education.

The perception at this level (to achieve the outputs) was readily instructed to the team at the grass roots level and shaped the documentation of the activities like the topics planned, attendance sheet and the issues noted down in the register at the Agahi centre. The monitoring of this planned 'empowerment' achieved through the project was done when the data gathered was statistically analyzed through MIS (monitoring information system) to determine the functionality of the systems put in place to bring it about like the Agahi centre. In addition to that, the pace and effectiveness of the 'empowerment' achieved was also monitored through planned questionnaires filled through a monitoring expert probing selected participants for their opinions on selected variables with regard to the activities conducted.

So deriving a perception from the rubric of the development project, 'empowerment' was perceived to be raising voices enabled by tangible voluntary participation by the women, having overcome the hindrance of conflicts/disputes like domestic violence and not only talking about their issues but ensuring they get resolved i.e. establishing authority in the public sphere.

8.1.2 Middle level – Empowerment operationalized

The task of carrying out the planned objectives of the project through the activities – meetings, study circles and Agahi centre as a platform – was relegated to the sister organization working at the grass roots level: Ahsas Welfare Foundation.

It was at this level that 'empowerment' conceptualized and programmed at the upper level was operationalized (conveyed to the beneficiaries); thus interacting with the local women. This interaction was dependent on the relations created between the local women and the women associated with the project at grass roots level i.e. resource person and focal persons. The perception of empowerment at this level was half way between that of the planned outputs and that arising out of the personal, practical experiences of the individuals

plus due to their constant interaction with the local women where they sympathized with them.

The perception of these women associated with the project whilst living in Dhoke Khabba were confident in their knowledge of what 'empowerment' is which they were made aware of due to their interaction with the NGOs and picking up on the jargon that is a necessity in this environment. In addition to these women and members of AWF, there were councillors and ADF (Aawaz District Forum) members who had been empowered through the project and were now a part of the project team; assisting in their peers' 'empowerment' at the village level.

Since at this level, the planned perception of 'empowerment' at first level clashed with the practicality of empowerment perceived by the women at the lower level, the dominant opinion was that empowerment can be achieved, through 'seed money' or that financial assistance was essential as an aid. Also, the existence of hindrances at the societal level was accepted as the reality – which proved as challenges to the project activities - but which, could be and should be overcome eventually.

From the analysis of the interaction at this level between the agency and the women and from the interviews of the participants, it was evident that the project was seen to be a positive attempt with benefits acquired in the shape of issues solved, confidence, increased mobility and as an opportunity to socialize but uncertainty about the practicality of its execution in their lives. However, they did utilize the platform to bring to attention issues that were disrupting their everyday lives. But in doing so, they didn't think beyond it or holding the government accountable for it. Keeping the project outputs in mind, they did raise voice but didn't strive for accountability. Also, health and education were not the focus of any issue raised in meetings.

Other than highlighting every day issues, keeping in mind the realities of their lives and their respective needs, the women used the platform and its resources to their own benefit – in getting monetary help and groceries for everyday use and in using the meetings as an escape from their responsibilities and worries for a few hours.

8.1.3 Local level – Empowerment perceived

The perception of empowerment at this level was dependent on the women's position in the society and their practical experiences. These perceptions – arising from definition, achievement, hindrances and possibility of empowerment – can be divided into three broad groups: those who believed that it can be achieved; those who believed that it is impossible to achieve and those who believed that they were happy the way they are and it's not applicable to them.

The possibility of empowerment achieved was seen as power in having children, getting their way as young females, by being a good wife, not causing trouble by being patient and compromising and following the religious parameters, so that they are considered responsible, trust worthy and honorable enough to have power within the household, being able to solve their problems and having a say in financial matters within their homes. It is interesting to note that the possibility of empowerment was perceived to be within the realm of the household.

Then there were women who declared that empowerment was not applicable to them because they were happy the way they are, and all their basic needs were being fulfilled. It was seen to be an unnecessary improvement in their lives, associated with mobility or 'going out' or getting a job. These women were happy with their confinement and seclusion to which they were born, comfortable with their sheltered lives.

A huge majority of the respondents – men and women alike – saw women's empowerment as impossible to achieve. They did so by highlighting the hindrances from their experiences in trying to have a say in household matters, get a job or have mobility: unable to get permission, weight of household responsibilities, domestic violence, women as barriers and lack of education. These hindrances were aided and were rooted in contextual inhibiting factors. In addition, some of them argued it wasn't possible because it wasn't permitted by Islam. These indigenous perceptions of empowerment can be seen as exerting pressure on the middle level – where the women's participation in the project activities is shaped by their perceptions.

8.1.4 Contextual inhibiting factors

Analysis of the data gleaned from the women's perceptions lead to an environmental assessment where factors that hindered the women's attempts at 'empowerment' arose: one, protection of honor where women's mobility was perceived to attract unnecessary attention and criticism and signifying that a woman's place was inside her home, also leading to permission issues. Second, power ascribed to men through patriarchal values, where they have control over finances, decision making and over women's lives as they have power by default. Third, religious values which justified women's place below that of a man's in Islam, her place within her home for modesty and consequently empowerment not well suited to a woman's disposition in Islam. And finally, socialization of women into gendered roles of housewives and mothers, teaching them to compromise, their place as being inside the home and being the weaker gender, needing men's protection and support rendering their own 'empowerment' culturally unacceptable.

These contextual inhibiting factors are significant in highlighting within the model simply because the women who participated in the project and carved their own alternative pathways of empowerment did so, whilst pushing against these inhibitions and hindrances posed by them. While their empowerment was restricted empowerment and their actions were well within their entrenchment of gender roles, they used their confidence, awareness and opportunities provided to them for what they perceived to be their benefit.

8.1.5 Alternative pathways to empowerment

This is a result of the middle level of this interaction (already discussed in detail in chapter 6) where as a result of the contextual inhibiting factors, in their interaction through Aawaz, women use the resources provided to them and their awareness to write applications, demand reciprocity in lieu of their participation in the meetings in the shape of rent and groceries. In addition, their participation was not seen by them as integral to their awareness, rather a necessity to uphold the relations with the indigenous project team members like the resource person.

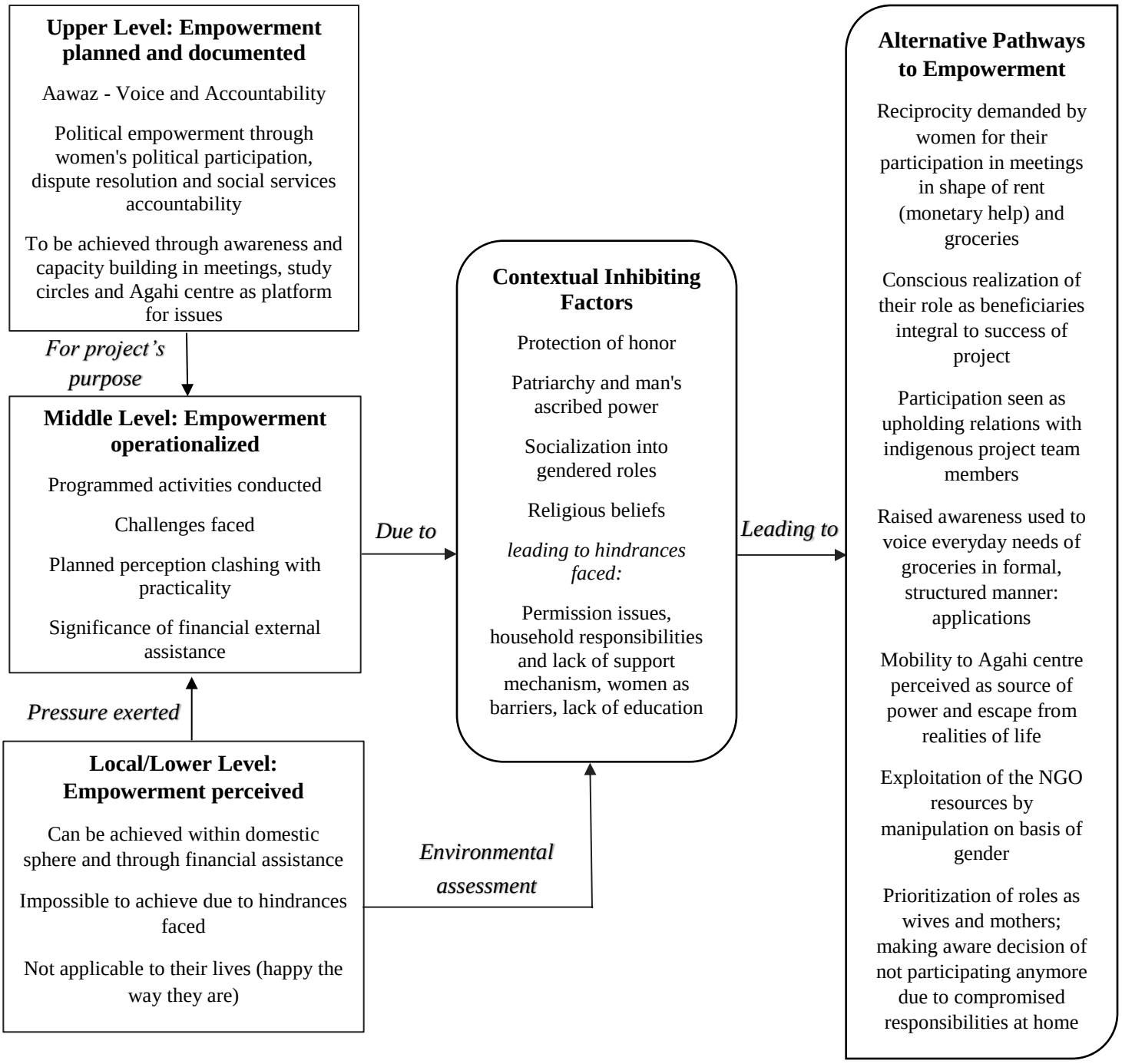
They also perceived their mobility to the centre as a source of power and use it as an escape and even manipulate and exploit the NGO on the basis of their gender. In doing so, they used their personal empowerment to their own personal benefits rather than for political and accountability purposes as envisioned by Aawaz. Also, several women made the decision of not coming to the meetings due to personal prioritization of their roles as mothers and wives and their evaluation of the benefits versus affected family life because of their participation. This was closely associated with their perception of empowerment as a concept and a process which comes under the next level.

The upper level attempts to create extensive and effective ways that could work with regard to 'empowerment' within the institutional structures created for this purpose and the middle level is where this structure disintegrates where in trying to implement them, hindrances and challenges are faced while the local level is rooted in realistic experiences, situated in the culture of poverty and patriarchy. There is theoretical discrepancy between empirical exercise of power as the alternative pathways to empowerment at middle level aren't taken as legitimate form of empowerment by the development agency at the upper level.

8.2 Model of women empowerment derived from symbolic interaction

In looking at empowerment of women as a development project goal and studying the symbolic interaction between the stakeholders arising from different criterion of meaning attached to empowerment, the model (Figure 8.1) on the next page is a representation of empowerment perceived at different levels within the project hierarchy.

Figure 4. A symbolic representation of women's empowerment as a development project goal



8.3 Conclusion

The rhetoric of development has used empowerment as goal in the projects and programmes aimed to better the lives of women in developing countries since a decade. In doing so, women in these countries – like Pakistan - are perceived to be 'helpless' individuals, trapped in disempowering situations that external interventions would be able to remedy. While this is true when one talks about the inhibiting factors that hinder women's exercise of power in this society, what goes wrong is when attempts at empowering women in Pakistan are subjected to indicators used to monitor and measure it for outsiders' own information and use. This is also true for the literature available on women's empowerment in Pakistan – measured through indicators but not seen as a participatory evaluation, the latter of which has been emphasized upon in studies conducted abroad (Nassbaum, 2000; Mohanty, 1991; Kabeer et al., 2001; Mayoux, 2002 etc)

This research has attempted to fill that gap by looking at the project as a symbolic interaction between all the stakeholders – including the women in Dhoke Khabba and their perspectives. The assumption that people's own assessments could only be simple and qualitative this cannot be aggregated may be true but their voices shouldn't be disregarded altogether, especially in a project that aims to achieve voice and accountability.

It has been concluded from the findings that while the project hoped to achieve political empowerment, women found alternative ways to their empowerment through the resources provided like individual, collective, relational and even economic empowerment. This shows the significance of needs assessment before implementation of a project; finding out what the women need and how to carry out interventions whilst overcoming the challenges that the societal structure and culture puts forth at the ground level.

Empowerment itself is an extremely vague and broad term, which allowed room for me as a researcher to regard the subtle negotiating and manipulative acts by women as an overt exercise of agency. This, for the development project, opens up the possibility of recognizing acts that may appear to be disempowering at first but rather, are the examples of women living their lives whilst achieving the most positive outcomes possible from

situations out of their control – like balancing the domestic life with the meetings by demanding rent for their spent time.

It was necessary to regard empowerment as a symbolic concept because there may be experiences of empowerment that take place outside the planned perceptions of conventional empowerment interventions, highlighting arenas where women exercise power by raising their voices for what they believe is important in their lives. Rather than looking at empowerment as a linear sequence of inputs, activities and outcomes, it should also be perceived within the parameters of negotiation and manipulation. (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010) Women, as individuals, are never disconnected from other individuals, local norms, traditions and values. Sometimes what women actually want and do are not the paths development organizations hope women would go down, but it is important to recognize the women's own decisions and perspectives even if they don't appear to be empowering, where empowerment may be derived from gender roles, responsibilities or religion etc.

Funding agencies are necessarily in a position of power in relation to activities they fund. When planning projects working towards women's empowerment, they need to consider the extent to which agency is able to accommodate the empowerment of women and to what extent it is threatening to the agency (Mosedale, 1998, p. 52). This is true for women in Dhoke Khabba demanding monetary assistance as a pre requisite for their participation, which was not seen as a legitimate exercise of awareness and mobilization due to the negative impact on project's funds.

Mainstream empowerment narratives apply normative frames of reference, imposing external values, notions of democracy and citizen engagement rather than accepting women's own context based experiences of empowerment. Therefore, it has been concluded that there does exist a gap between those carrying out empowerment processes and those being empowered.

Further, the sustainability of the interventions is dependent on addressing the structures by which gender inequality and poverty has perpetuated overtime in the Pakistani society. As the findings of this research also display, these pose challenges for agencies seeking to

facilitate empowerment practically. Without physical, psychological and economic security, empowerment remains a meaningless term on paper. Powerlessness is experienced in a specific context and interaction, while those who plan for empowerment are far removed from these circumstances.

Many of the local women opined that external assistance was necessary for empowerment but it should be financial. This stems from the fact that unless and until basic needs are not fulfilled in the face of poverty, a common man or woman will not think about their rights or their political participation. Rather, they will utilize any means necessary to fulfill their basic needs. This was true to the project under study as well, as the women made the 'travel allowance' into a motivation for their participation and firmly believed that it was their right because they were doing the organization a favor, rather than the other way around. It can be concluded that counter to many arguments put forth against economic empowerment, it is the starting point of any kind of empowerment in developing countries because without it, any other intervention would be turned into a means for monetary benefits, like Aawaz.

When I went into these women's homes, they opened their lives, suffering and problems to me; I experienced their warm hospitality, dignity and their overwhelmed states over their troubles. It was apparent why women favored economic gains over political empowerment. When talking about their empowerment, it is clear that it cannot be bestowed. It needs to be a result of women's own actions, which they partake voluntarily and when it provides them with tangible benefits. While qualitative researches such as this one paint a picture about the women's realities and their perspectives on their own empowerment, the possibility is that development agencies will continue business as usual which puts a question mark on women's empowerment in Pakistan, especially in Dhoke Khabba, Rawalpindi.

It is necessary for development agencies to utilize empowerment in the development projects keeping in mind its multi-faceted nature and use it to their advantage in bringing about sustained outputs. By recognizing it both as a concept and process of a symbolic nature and local women being autonomous – as has been emphasized in this research – it can be seen as having the highest potential to be sustained when being operationalized

through participatory evaluation rather than with externally decided and imposed perceptions.

8.4 Recommendations and the way forward

How then might the conception of empowerment being a symbolic vehicle for different meanings be translated into practical action in Dhoke Khabba, through development projects? The following are recommended:

- Women empowerment initiatives should move from ‘for women’ to ‘consultation with women’ approach to ensure there is negotation between the women and development agencies in order to discover all the needs and constraints rather than mere imposition of models
- Planning and monitoring of the projects intending to empower women should consider open ended data collection tools rather than structured questionnaires which would allow for needs assessment for current and future projects. Outcomes an impacts should be described by those experiencing the change themselves
- Documentation and evaluation for empowerment projects shouldn’t be statistical, driven towards maximum number of participants rather than impact of the intervention, accommodating local specificity and experiences
- Existing hierarchies in NGOs impede the efficiency of the project where the women know they exist at the bottom – making them less motivated to work ‘for’ the project rather than for themselves; they should be made to feel like they are stakeholders
- The change envisioned via political empowerment should cater to the practical, lived realities of the women and may be more effective through an economic entry-point which can have spill-over effects on other aspects of women’s lives
- Projects should be designed for awareness raising for men in the community, in order to change the patriarchal mindset which hinders women’s attempts at empowerment

Therefore, in recognizing a non-linear nature of empowerment, any organization working towards women’s empowerment should do so whilst knowing that they cannot control the

process and that they are dealing with individuals who are not passive. It will require delegation of its own power to those being empowered in order to sustain the impact of the intervention, while paying attention to and giving importance to the needs and perspectives of the local women.

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Glossary

Aawaz	Voice
Agahi	Awareness
Angan	Home
Baikhtiar	Empowerment
Bait ul maal	Public Treasury
Begherat	Shameless
Bura Mahol	Bad atmosphere
Burqa	Long dress with facial covering used by Muslim women
Chaddar	Wide Shawl
Charpai	Wooden bedstead
Ehsas e kamtari	Low self esteem
Faisla Sazi	Decision making
Gaali	Abuse
Galian	Streets
Ghar	House
Gharelu	Homemaker
Izzat	Respect or honor
Ikhtiar	Power

Jamhuriat	Democracy
Jithani	Husband's brother's wife
Kameez	Long shirt
Khawateen	Women
Khuli Kacheri	Open court
Maashra	Culture
Mohalla	Neighborhood
Nikkah	Marriage
Parda	To cover, veiling
Ramzan	The month of fasting
Rashan	Groceries
Rherhi lagana	To sell things on a cart
Riwayat	Tradition
Rozgar	Employment
Samjhota	Compromise
Shalwar	Trouser
Taaluq	Contact
Tashadud	Violence