Dee Jupp
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with contribution from
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Measuring Empowerment? Ask Them

Quantifying qualitative outcomes from people's own analysis

Insights for results-based management
from the experience of a social movement in Bangladesh

Sida

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'We used to be afraid to walk along the same path as a jotdar (landowner). Now we walk down the centre of the road'. [1]

Member of the Social Movement, 2007.

'The best people to assess empowerment are the people who may or may not be empowered. One of the slogans which is used in PRA[2] is[2] "Ask them".'

Robert Chambers, Open University Interview, 2002.

1 Quoted in Impact assessment of social mobilisation for economic empowerment, Steve Jones,Tahera Yasmin, Devendra Gauchan Alamgir Chowdhury, 2007.

2 Participatory Rural Appraisal.

Foreword

The need to measure development and demonstrate results has never been more urgent within donor agencies than it is today. The question asked by many donor agencies and tax payers is to what extent international aid contributes to poverty reduction and development. In response to this, the agencies are developing sophisticated systems to track results and assess value for money.

Processes of development and social change are never easy to measure though, and results can be elusive and difficult to evaluate. It is easier to count schools than to measure the impact of education. However, there are from time to time innovative and cutting edge efforts made to measure the "immeasurable", and in Bangladesh we found one such example.

This study shows how poor people in Bangladesh are working together in a social movement to achieve a better life for themselves. It gives us a valuable example of how empowerment, as a key prerequisite for social change and development, is measured and accounted for by the people closest to these change processes, and used by them for future work. The additional value for an agency like Sida is that the learning and knowledge accumulated by the people themselves is translated into qualitative and quantitative information which supports a more people-oriented management system for development results.

Sida recognised and saw this process in action; we were impressed and decided to document it. We often talk about "lessons learned" and "capacity building", but tend to forget to see what lessons the poorest of the poor themselves can teach us.

Therefore, read and learn how empowerment looks and is measured by poor people themselves. Their empowerment and results are what matters.

Esse Nilsson
Helena Thorfinn

Preface

We, development professionals, are lucky to be living and working at this time. For there is an explosion of participatory methodologies, and a constant opening up of possibilities. Tragically, though, many innovations are one-off, never written up, and never shared. The innovators may not see their significance. Managers in organisations and sponsors in donor agencies have other priorities. And methodologies with potential to transform the quality of what is done in the name of development are all too often one-off and never spread.

Here, though, we have an outstanding exception: a methodological breakthrough made accessible to the development community at large.

Consider the context. For over a decade empowerment has been prominent in the rhetoric of development. Attempts to monitor and measure it have typically relied on indicators decided by outsiders for their own information and use. Professionals have believed that people's own assessments could only be simple and qualitative and could not be aggregated; that little of local people's time should be demanded; and that local-level staff had to facilitate analysis.

Now we have an approach and methods evolved with and for a social movement in Bangladesh which turns these on their heads. Groups assess themselves using indicators generated earlier through a participatory process; the indicators are many – 132; an elegant method quantifies and aggregates them to show distributions, trends and surprises; local people themselves facilitate group analysis, releasing staff time and avoiding deferential responses; and people enthusiastically give time to assessments because they are important for their own learning, planning and progress.

Such radical reversals were not easy. Salaried field staff felt threatened by some findings. Donors were sceptical until they had direct experience of the group reflections; and when new donors and their consultants arrived, it was back to square one again. This should never happen again. Let sceptics read the balanced evaluation by Carlos Barahona, made with the authority of a critical professional statistician. Measuring Empowerment? shows how participatory assessments can empower and transform relationships, and at

the same time generate reliable and valid statistics for what were thought to be only qualitative dimensions.

A big lesson has been that to invent, evolve and establish such a participatory methodology demands creativity, tenacity, continuity and champions. It shows that the gains can be all round. Reports were more credible and insightful. The movement's salaried staff learnt with surprise about the range of activities and diversity of benefits perceived by members. The process of assessing empowerment was itself empowering for local groups, whose members are the primary users. This is a methodological breakthrough, a remarkable win-win for all concerned.

This is a "must-read" for all who are committed to empowerment, rights-based approaches and good governance. It shows the power of privileging the realities and priorities of those who are marginalised and living in poverty. I defy any committed and open-minded professional to read this without feeling excited. May what is written here be internalised and acted on by all concerned in lender or donor agencies, governments, NGOs, social movements, research institutes and universities. May they be encouraged by its approach and example to invent, disseminate and share other participatory methodologies. Well-facilitated and taken to scale, approaches like this have huge potential to transform our world.

Congratulations to the pioneers of this approach for their creativity and persistence, to the Movement, its members and staff, for showing what it could do, and to Sida for sponsoring it and having it written up. May other donors follow suit whenever there is need and opportunity. May this publication be seen and read by many. And may others be inspired by its example to do likewise.

Robert Chambers

Preamble

Participation has been widely taken up as an essential element of development, but participation for what purpose? Many feel that its acceptance, which has extended to even the most conventional of institutions such as the international development banks, has resulted in it losing its teeth in terms of the original ideology of being able to empower those living in poverty and to challenge power relations. The more recent emergence of the rights-based approach discourse has the potential to restore the 'bite' to participation and to re-politicise development. Enshrined in universal declarations and conventions, it offers a palatable route to accommodating radicalism and creating conditions for emancipatory and transformational change, particularly for people living in poverty. But an internet search on how to *measure the impact* of these approaches yields a disappointing harvest of experience. There is a proliferation of debate on the origins and processes, the motivations and pitfalls of rights-based programming *but little on how to know when or if it works.* The discourse is messy and confusing and leads many to hold up their hands in despair and declare that outcomes are intangible, contextual, individual, behavioural, relational and fundamentally un-quantifiable! As a consequence, results-based management pundits are resorting to substantive measurement of products, services and goods which demonstrate outputs and rely on perception studies to measure outcomes.

However, there is another way. Quantitative analyses of qualitative assessments of outcomes and impacts can be undertaken with relative ease and at low cost. It is possible to measure what many regard as unmeasurable.

This publication suggests that steps in the process of attainment of rights and the process of empowerment are easy to identify and measure for those active in the struggle to achieve them. It is our etic perspectives that make the whole thing difficult. When we apply normative frames of reference, we inevitably impose our values and our notions of democracy and citizen engagement rather than embracing people's own context-based experience of empowerment.

This paper presents the experience of one social movement in Bangladesh, which managed to find a way to measure empowerment by letting the members themselves explain what benefits they acquired from the Movement and by developing a means to measure change over time. These measures, which are primarily of use to the members, have then been subjected to numerical analysis outside of the village environment to provide convincing quantitative data, which satisfies the demands of results-based management.

The paper is aimed primarily at those who are excited by the possibilities of rights-based approaches but who are concerned about proving that their investment results in measurable and attributable change. The experience described here should build confidence that transparency, rigour and reliability can be assured in community-led approaches to monitoring and evaluation without distorting the original purpose, which is a system of reflection for the community members themselves. Hopefully, the reader will feel empowered to challenge the sceptics.

Dee Jupp and Sohel Ibn Ali

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we would like to acknowledge the contribution of the members of the Movement, who showed us how change in their lives came from membership of the Movement and enthusiastically embraced ways to track these changes, who constantly surprised us with their own insights and initiatives and were quick to put us right.

The authors also acknowledge the contributions made by the following, particularly in the early stages of development of the approach. We are particularly grateful that they were so flexible and willing to admit their biases so we could all explore new ways of doing things. They are Sarah Robens, Syed Rokon Uddin, Enamul Huda, Ohidul Islam Kazal, Mazharul Islam Matriq, Shahida Khatun and Nurual Islam Bhuiyan.

We would also like to thank Helena Thorfinn at Sida, who, after seeing the process in action herself, enthused energetically and worked hard to persuade her colleagues and peers within the donor consortium funding the Movement of the efficacy of the approach. She constantly supported us and was the inspiration behind the decision to put our experiences on paper for others to share.

Dee Jupp and Sohel Ibn Ali

List of Abbreviations and Glossary

ACCESS	Awareness, Capacity and Confidence, Effectiveness and Self Sustaining
Char	Word used for small riverine islands in Bangladesh
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
ESS	Effectiveness, Self Sustainability
GDI	Group Development Index
Khas	Government-owned land and water resources intended for use by the public and which may be handed over to the poor in Bangladesh through official registration.[2]
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
Mother organisation	Refers to administration, training and paid staff of the social movement referred to in this study
NGO	Non Government Organisation
PGR	Participatory Grassroots Review
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RBM	Results-Based Management
SDI	Social Development Index
shalish	Village level judicial court in Bangladesh
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UP	Union Parishad (council) – the lowest tier of local government in Bangladesh
WAC	Women's Action Committee

2 The current Government pledges to hand over a minimum fixed area each year.

Summary

Rights-based approaches to development have been promoted since the late 1990s, but very little progress has been made in finding ways to measure the effectiveness of such approaches. The contested concept of empowerment is generally regarded as the key outcome of rights-based approaches, but has eluded quantification and attempts at measurement are often dismissed as anecdotal.

Figure 1. From denial of rights ...

Figure 2. To active realisation of rights

– But how do we measure it?
Through a combination of serendipity and stubbornness, a social movement in Bangladesh has persuaded sceptics that a robust and valid quantitative method based purely on qualitative self assessment can work. This experience can be replicated in other programmes where empowerment, capacity building, realisation of rights and good governance are intended outcomes.

Although the empowerment of people living in poverty has been a key intended outcome in many programmes over the last decade, attempts to monitor and measure it have typically relied on indicators and methods decided by and facilitated by outsiders for their own information and use. Professionals have believed that people's own assessments could only be simple and qualitative, and could not be aggregated and usefully quantified. As a consequence, there has been a tendency to rely on case studies and stories to supplement conventional surveys. The approach presented in *Measuring Empowerment? Ask Them* demonstrates that it is possible to facilitate people's

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own assessments, which provide sufficient and robust evidence to satisfy the demands of results-based management. In the foreword to the publication, Robert Chambers has heralded the approach adopted by this social movement as a methodological breakthrough and a 'win win' situation for all concerned.

The empowerment measurement dilemma is typified by the comment of a DFID Advisor about the social movement before the evaluation approach was developed; *'I know in my heart that they are doing good work, but not in my head'*. This echoes feelings of unease expressed by many about relying solely on qualitative evidence to prove effectiveness.

Empowerment is a contested concept and a moving target. It comprises complex, interrelated elements embracing values, knowledge, behaviour and relationships. The empowerment process is non-linear and depends largely on experience gained from opportunities to exercise rights that are inherently context specific. So, for example, people may become socially empowered but have limited political empowerment in one context, but may become relatively politically empowered with limited social empowerment in another. The non-linear and context-specific nature of empowerment poses a challenge for conventional monitoring, which generally assumes a linear progression and details milestones to be attained. The approach presented here, on the other hand, embraces the idea that different aspects of empowerment may be achieved asymmetrically and at a different pace in different contexts, by recognising and quantifying all positive changes.

The complex nature of empowerment has led many to conclude that such outcomes are intangible, contextual, individual, behavioural, relational and fundamentally un-quantifiable. This approach proves that it is possible to quantify qualitative information generated by people themselves. This quantification is carried out, following the community-level self-assessment exercises, through an elegant method, which weights and aggregates the data to show distributions, trends and correlations.

As empowerment is a value-laden term and the consequence of further value-laden processes (e.g. participation, demanding and realising rights), there is no common definition. Furthermore, it is inappropriate for outsiders to pre-determine people's experience of empowerment. The approach presented here privileges people's own experience, their perceptions and realities, resulting in all the indicators being derived from their own analysis of change.

The approach can be divided into two distinct parts; the first is led by insiders (project participants) themselves and the second comprises collation and analysis of the insider-generated data by outsiders. This division is important. Part 1 is a process managed entirely by and for the project participants. They enthusiastically give time to their self assessments because they are important for their own learning, planning and progress. The process of evaluation is in itself empowering. Analytical frameworks are imposed on the data generated by people only after the assessment to ensure that outsider values and judgement do not influence the outcome. This is Part 2 and is primarily for the project staff and funders.

The whole process kicks off with a participatory procedure to gather perceptions and insights from people regarding the benefits and motivations involved in project participation. These processes can use participatory rural appraisal (PRA) approaches, drama, story-telling, songs, picture making, conversations and debate to generate statements which describe their experience.

These descriptive statements are clustered and re-worded in order to be meaningful to all project participants. Each year project participants sit together at a suitable time to review each indicator, clarifying and discussing it and, finally, scoring a happy or sad face to indicate whether they feel they have or have not achieved it (although a binary score was used in this case, it would be possible to use ranked scores to provide more nuanced reflections of their progress). The process is facilitated by members of other groups and the event is well attended and taken very seriously, as it leads to self reflection and action plans for subsequent years. As the process is self-facilitated there is no deference to outsiders. As there are no material benefits to be gained from exaggerating performance, the scoring is realistic. The assessment process is regarded by group members as entirely for their own benefit and an important exercise, which as far as they are concerned is where it ends.

Part 2 is done externally by project staff in order to meet the demands of results-based management. The results of the self assessments are collected with the permission of the groups, and are aggregated and processed to provide analysis for programme design, staff performance assessment and to satisfy donors' need for reliable quantitative information. The data is categorised and weighted to enable trends, distributions and correlations to be reviewed. These analyses have met the criteria of the most vociferous of critics.

Measuring Empowerment? shows how participatory assessments can empower and transform relationships, while at the same time generating reliable and valid statistics for what were thought to be only qualitative dimensions. This publication sets out the challenges entailed in measuring empowerment and describes how these challenges were largely overcome in the development of the evaluation tool. The evolution and application of the tool are explained and examples provided of how the data generated can be used for the purposes of results-based management, in particular focusing on performance and achievement of outcomes and impact. The introduction of such an approach was not without its critics and the publication explains how these were faced. Carlos Barahona, a professional statistician, provides a balanced external critique of the method that challenges these sceptics. Finally, a section provides step by step guidance for replicating the approach in other programmes.

1 Introduction

This study describes an evaluation approach which can be applied to projects with a rights-based perspective with empowerment of rights-holders as an outcome. It privileges people's own experience of empowerment and uses their perceptions of changes affecting themselves and changes in their relationship with duty bearers.

But as we write this we can already hear the sceptics! *Measuring empowerment?* they say – just another manual recommending perception studies and a raft of wishy-washy participatory exercises to gather so-called insights. It sounds time consuming and costly. And what we really need is substantive quantitative evidence of our investment, not anecdotal qualitative stuff. Anyway, empowerment is both a contested concept and a moving target. The publication title continues with Ask them – oh no, another self assessment. It will lack rigour and will almost certainly be biased. No, say the sceptics, we can't be bothered with this.

Well, this is what makes this approach different and what leads Robert Chambers to refer to this as a 'methodological breakthrough' (see Preface). The following table highlights the key features of this approach which counter the often somewhat valid criticisms of evaluations of this kind. It was indeed fortunate that as this approach to evaluation was developed many of the sceptics' arguments were confronted head-on. It was a challenge to convince both programme staff and funders of the legitimacy of the method.
However, refining the approach amidst an ocean of criticism has ultimately led to greater rigour.

Table 1. Responding to the sceptics

Sceptic's view	But this approach....
There are few examples of successful quantification of qualitative data.	Provides quantified qualitative data which satisfies most of the needs of results-based management.
Empowerment is contested.	Accepts this, but relies only on the perception of empowerment of those whom the project is designed to empower.
Empowerment is a moving target.	Accepts and embraces this idea.
Qualitative studies like this are costly and time-consuming.	Costs less than one percent of the annual project expenditure. Those giving time are the project participants themselves and they do so willingly as they see it as an essential and integral part of their empowerment process.
Self-assessment is biased.	Provides no material benefits from exaggerating achievement.
Qualitative evaluations lack rigour.	Earns rigour through its careful design and the reliability and validity of the data collected and analysed.
Requires special skills and capacity of the implementing organisation.	Is largely managed by the community itself with exchange of facilitators between community groups. Skilled facilitators can be trained in a few days, mostly on the job. Uses very little project personnel time, freeing them to do the job they are paid for. Our experience has shown that there is no need for a costly and resource-intensive Monitoring and Evaluation Unit as data entry and generation of correlations are very straightforward, leaving programme managers to review and analyse the data, which serves the organisation better than relying on M&E experts who often work in isolation from the 'front line'.
But we cannot change predetermined indicators in the log frame, this is too open ended.	Does indeed require flexibility so that communities can identify their own indicators, which can be included in the log frame.
It won't satisfy the demands of results-based management.	Provides possibilities for analysis of the quantified qualitative data, which can satisfy the needs for assessing provision of goods and services, performance, changes in behaviour, attitude and practice, as well as impact.
How can we judge accountability?	In line with donor policy to increasingly emphasise citizen accountability, this approach promotes downward accountability. There are no incentives for exaggerating achievements and this approach is likely to reveal genuine change experienced by rights holders.

NB: Further discussion of the sceptics' view is provided in chapters 7 and 8.

So read on, sceptics and converts!

There is no other way to start than with the voices and opinions of the people living in poverty, who know what empowerment means to them and who have developed their own way of assessing change. There can be no better reality check. The following describes how members of the Movement in Bangladesh used drama to explore what was important to them in terms of change resulting from membership. Drama is rich in Bangladesh and using this medium was natural and very quick to pull together. However, other forms of expression could be used equally, such as story-telling, picture making, photography, singing, PRA evaluations, conversations and group discussions, depending on the cultural context. This is what happened:

In April 2007 we asked three groups of women and three groups of men in quite different locations in rural Bangladesh to develop dramas to tell the story of their social movement. Each group was asked to prepare three scenes; the first illustrating life before association with the Movement, the second illustrating the current situation and the third depicting their aspirations for the near future (around 2–3 years). Apart from this framework, the groups were given no other guidance; no hints or input: nothing from us. We went away and left them entirely on their own to 'come up with something'. The intention was to enable the groups to express themselves *freely* and *spontaneously*.

After an hour or so, the groups were ready to perform their dramas. Their performances were recorded unobtrusively by a locally-hired videographer. The dramas were remarkable. In fact, when later shown to support staff of the Movement, there was almost disbelief. Each drama portrayed clear and unambiguous examples of what empowerment meant for the group members. The stories were based on real experiences rather than regurgitated rhetoric and were peppered with perspectives that had never occurred to the staff (so, by inference, could not have been influenced by the staff). Each drama was nuanced to the group's own understanding and context for change. The following are two very brief summaries of two of the group's dramas to illustrating their view of empowerment.

Figure 3.No status and long hours of domestic chores

WOMEN'S DRAMA

Scene 1: Before joining the Movement. *At the homestead. The scene opens with the wife crouched awkwardly sweeping the yard; her head and face are covered by her sari. The mother-in-law enters and berates the wife for being lazy. She beats her. The husband returns from labouring and joins in the haranguing of the wife. She weeps but gets on with preparing food. They sit down to eat with their two children; the husband and boy get fed preferentially. The wife eats, after everyone else has finished, whatever is left from the meal-just gravy and rice. Only the boy goes to school (but irregularly) as he has to tend the meagre livestock and collect fire-wood. The girl is told to stay and help with the chores and also goes to work in the house of the rich in order to be fed. The father discusses at length with the mother-in-law the arrangements to get the girl married as soon as possible to incur the least possible dowry costs. The father brings home gifts from the market for his beloved son and nothing for his wife and daughter.*

Figure 4. Eating together as a family

Scene 2: The present situation (2007). *At the homestead. The actors have changed into better clothes, look healthier (happier) and are working together. However, the wife is not well and the husband and mother-in-law insist that she rests and they take on her domestic chores. The wife is allowed to visit the doctor*

alone and money is available for her treatment. The children are going to school regularly and time is made for them to study after school. The chores are shared between them. The gifts from their father's trips to market are equally shared. Mealtimes are taken together and food also equally shared. The father will not agree to the early marriage of his daughter – she will get an education and then employment, 'he' says.

Figure 5. Campaigning for local elections

Scene 3: The future. *The boy and girl are to get access to higher education. The parents feel that this way they will have the knowledge and confidence to fight corruption. The family expects them to come back to serve the community after they have qualified. The wife and husband continue to enjoy good relations inside and outside the home. They make economic decisions together and regard their relationship as friendship. The wife is considering standing for local elections, with her husband's encouragement. She will campaign for improvements to the road and plans to mobilise volunteers to rebuild and protect the culverts. The community is very supportive of her ideas.*

MEN'S DRAMA

Scene 1: Before joining the Movement. *At the market. All the 'actors' wear shabby clothing and make it clear that they have nothing else to wear. Their low status and appearance leads them to be ostracised from social gatherings. They are discussing the lack of work and the conditions in which they have to work on others' land. There is competition for jobs and only the most able-bodied get them. They are mostly paid with poor-quality rice and often they are not paid straight away. They are invited to social gatherings to work all day with the promise of a good meal but after a long day's work they do not actually get the food promised. They feel humiliated and powerless. The rich landlord's son takes advantage of one of the labourer's daughters as she works as a maid servant in his home. There is no means to seek justice. The local informal court panders only to the rich and metes*

out punishment to the poor. The scene ends with a violent confrontation between the workers and the land grabber.

Figure 6. Fighting the land grabbers

Scene 2: The present situation (2007). *The men are better clothed and not only work as daily labourers, but also on their own land. In times of crisis, they can count on their savings. Through the unity of the Movement they take action to confront the issues of land-grabbing and sexual harassment of the labourer's daughter, and insist that the local court delivers justice. The impact of their action turns the tables on the traditional client-patron relationship. They are now included in the local village court decision-making process and even convene the court themselves at times. They are proactive in promoting social values in the community and vigilant against early marriage, unlawful divorce, harassment and criminal activity, discussing how to tackle these in their weekly meetings. They are invited to social gatherings as guests, not workers.*

Scene 3: The future. *The men are very active in the local court and local government and continue to monitor corruption. They are actively promoting collective income-generating projects and using under-utilised resources productively. They are respected citizens to whom others turn for advice. Community relations are harmonious and families are living free from harassment.*

These brief summaries provide a wealth of insight into some of the changes people living in poverty have experienced in a period of less than two decades. The nature of a summary does not do justice to some of the extraordinarily profound observations that were shared in the dramas, but nevertheless both demonstrate a clear shift from individualism to collectivism, from marginalisation to inclusion, from inequality at home and in the wider community to increasing equality, from a life without dignity to one with.

The women's group drama illustrates how social changes at home had to be made first before economic and political opportunities could be explored. Look again at figure 4; the 'man' is a woman dressed up as a man; an extraordinary sight in Bangladesh and all the more so if one recalls how in the 1980s interviews with women had to be conducted by women across curtains and, as recently as the turn of the millennium, many women were forbidden to talk to men who were not their relatives. Yet, in 2007, these women feel confident enough to devise their own drama, dress and behave as men and perform in front of strangers!

The men's drama concentrates on the struggles for economic justice which subsequently led to increasing opportunities for political participation. Their inclusion in village decision-making is a result of changes in social capital accumulation and enables them to have an influence on their individual and collective economic and political capital.

However, the real breakthrough is that both dramas identify indicators that can be measured! And this is the point of this exercise. The first two scenes depict what has already happened. Only the last scenes hint at normative development, but through the subjects' eyes, not those of the outside observer or potential interventionist. From these dramas, numerous statements have been made, which illustrate stages in empowerment; statements made by 'the persons who may or may not have been empowered' (Chambers, 2002).

It is statements such as these, which can then be compiled and presented to other project participants to assess if they have any resonance with their own experience.

As mentioned above, these statements do not need to come from dramas. They can come from discussions, reviews, conversations, self-evaluations, storytelling, and pictures; in fact, any means which enables those living in poverty to express their own opinions about change.

With repeated reviews in different places and with different groups in different stages of development and different contexts, it is feasible to compile sufficient numbers of such statements to cover a range of empowerment experiences. No two groups will have the exact same experience or context but will nevertheless be able to relate to different elements of a mixed bag of experiences. If we then compile these into categories of experience, e.g. social empowerment, economic empowerment, political empowerment and organisational empowerment, it becomes possible to track the degree of attainment within these categories by the number of fully-realised statements. We thus have two important parts of the evaluation;

firstly, development of a series of process, output and outcome statements, which can be worded as indicators and can be monitored and evaluated; secondly, a process of feeding the findings into conventional results-based management systems.

In short, the evaluation of empowerment can be generalised as comprising the following;

Part 1: Community level
1. Facilitation of some means of community expression (drama, pictures, conversations, discussions, storytelling) to generate statements about project-driven change at individual and collective levels.
2. Compilation of the range of statements describing the processes, outputs and outcomes of participation and empowerment.
3. Facilitating the review of these statements by others living in poverty, who assess them for coherence/divergence with/from their own experiences.

Part 1 is what interests participants and provides opportunities for their own reflections and learning on the processes of change they are experiencing and the effectiveness of the support provided by the project. And according to them, it provides important and further opportunities for empowerment. In other words, the process of self-evaluation in itself is empowering.

Part 2: Results-based management level
Part 2 entails an external analysis which examines the effectiveness for results-based management from a programme perspective. This part is what interests the project administration, implementers and funders.
4. The use of the community-level review of statements, with the agreement of the community. The purely qualitative information is quantified by assigning numerical values based on the number of fully-realised empowerment statements. Group development can be tracked by aggregating the groups' total empowerment scores (equal to the number of fully-realised statements). More detail can be obtained by tracking the scores of the four individual empowerment components (social, economic, political, and organisational).
5. The statement review data is analysed across the entire data set. For example, assessment of individual statements can be tracked to assess which aspects of empowerment are easier/harder to

achieve and what correlations can be made between elements of empowerment and context, input and resources.

These two parts of the process are further developed in chapters 4, 5 and 6 and can be applied to a variety of situations where empowerment is to be measured.

To conclude this introduction, we refer back to the Social Movement members. They have called the process 'protipholan', which means 'reflection' in Bangla. They lead Part 1 of the process and are fully-engaged with this. They claim that the annual exercise of going through the series of compiled statements is very important for them. They score their achievements, reflect and learn. It is motivating, local and 'theirs'.

Outsiders only come into the picture at the data analysis stage (part 2), where they can aggregate and quantify data and make deductions.

2 The Problem of Measuring Empowerment

Before we attempt to discuss the problems associated with measuring empowerment, we need to be sure we know what it is. It is a contested concept and the debate surrounding it possibly parallels the evolution of participatory development, which continues to evolve with the current emphasis on rights and the opening-up of democratic spaces.

In this section, we posit that, generally, the measurement of outcomes of participation is circumscribed by the rationale for the adoption of the participatory development paradigm. For example, economists look for greater efficiencies resulting from participation (better-designed projects, ownership and long-term interest in outcomes and sustainability), whereas sociologists and activists, despite seemingly using the same lexicon as the economists, seek different outcomes; social justice, realisation of rights, reduction of power distance and improved civic and state interaction. These are variously described as empowerment outcomes. We therefore argue, that by relying on the participants themselves to explain the changes experienced, it is likely that these explanations will be unencumbered by any of these professional biases. We contend that it is better to use our external analytical frameworks *following* the collection of the data rather than in designing what data should be collected and how.

We noted at the beginning of this section that we *need to be sure what empowerment is.....* And herein lies the first problem with trying to measure it.

EMPOWERMENT – WHAT IS IT REALLY?

In 1999, Page and Czuba wrote, '*our recent literature review of articles indicating a focus on empowerment... resulted in no clear definition of the concept across disciplinary lines..... As a result, many have come to view "empowerment" as nothing more than the most recently popular buzzword to be thrown in to make sure old programmes get new funding.' Nearly a decade later the term is still assumed rather than defined and is still contested e.g. 'Empowerment' is a term that has been embraced by a diverse range of institutions, from the World Bank to Oxfam to many more radical NGOs, but few of these share common definitions* (Scrutton and Luttrell, 2007).

The term has different connotations in different socio-cultural and political contexts and is shaped by beliefs and value systems. Most definitions suggest that empowerment is the process of gaining power over decisions and resources. This was particularly promoted by the NGO movement in the 1980s as part of their alternative development agenda. For many, empowerment can only be set in the context of power. If power is finite, empowerment must involve the contest to seize power. If power is not a zero-sum concept it must be able to change and expand, thus embracing the idea of shared power or 'power with....' (Kreisberg, 1992). However, others do not consider the context of power and limit empowerment to an assumed outcome of basically 'invited' participation.

> **BOX 1 SOME EXAMPLES OF THE RANGE OF DEFINITIONS OF 'EMPOWERMENT':**
>
> 'Empowerment involves challenging the forms of oppression which compel millions of people to play a part in their society on terms which are inequitable, or in ways which deny their human rights' (Oxfam, 1995).
>
> Empowerment is 'a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives' (Page and Czuba, 1999).
>
> 'The process through which those who are currently disadvantaged achieve equal rights, resources and power' (Mayoux, 2008).
>
> The UK Government communities' website states, 'Community Empowerment is about people and government, working together to make life better. It involves more people being able to influence decisions about their communities, and more people taking responsibility for tackling local problems, rather than expecting others to' (http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/).
>
> 'The expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.' World Bank Sourcebook on Empowerment (2002)

The debate clearly covers a range of perceptions. For post-Marxists, *empowerment is a matter of collective mobilisation of marginalised groups against the disempowering activities of the state and market* – it is thus inherently conflictual and requires structural transformation (Mohan and Stokke). Others argue that the empowerment of civil society to exert organised pressure on autocratic and unresponsive states and thereby support democratic stability and good governance requires a top-down strategy to make institutions more efficient within the existing

power structures and to place emphasis on the institutional transformation required. However, many would regard even this as a radical view of empowerment. Alsop and Heinsohn (2005), who take a more capacity-building view of empowerment, define empowerment as *'enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes'* and thus suggest that it is both a process and an end result. The World Bank Sourcebook on Empowerment (2002, see box) identifies empowerment as *the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.* More broadly stated, empowerment is thus about increasing people's choices and freedom of action and is important for its intrinsic value as well as its instrumental value in improving development effectiveness for poor people. The empowerment framework promoted in the World Bank Sourcebook identifies four elements that seem to be critical across experiences, namely *access to information; inclusion/participation; social accountability; and local organizational capacity.* It further applies these elements to four critical development objectives: provision of basic services, improving local and national governance, access to markets and access to justice. Scrutton and Luttrell (2007) provide an insightful view into the different ways funding agencies and international NGOs define empowerment and note differences related to seeing empowerment both as a process and an outcome, the emphasis on agency versus structure and seeing it as something which insiders rather than outsiders can affect.

EMPOWERMENT AS A PROCESS AND OUTCOME OF PARTICIPATION

Despite some early attempts to include beneficiaries in decision-making around development objectives (e.g. Girvans, 1932), a participatory development movement really emerged during the 1980s as a paradigm shift away from conventional development. The empowerment concept (as an outcome of participation) gained support at this time, particularly among NGOs promoting the alternative development agenda. Chambers (1983) was highly influential in this period and characterised conventional development as a preference for providing assistance to state institutions, working within centres of power, the modern over traditional technologies, quantitative analysis over subjective experience, market approaches over subsistence production and industry over agriculture. Participatory devel-

opment, on the other hand, involves a people-centred approach. Participatory development, at least in part, owes its heritage to the work of the Brazilian educationalist, Paulo Freire (1921–1997). In his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), Freire emphasised the importance of *Dialogue:* the process of conversational encounter and exploration with others that enables critical analysis of the world; *Praxis:* a process of reflection and action which embodies a commitment to human well-being, the search for truth and respect for others, and; *Conscientisation:* the process of *'learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality'* (Shaull et al. 1972, p.15) and seizing power to transform reality (Taylor, 1993). This work spawned a generation of NGOs, which promoted his ideals. His thesis clearly makes the connection between access to information, participation and individual and collective agency to make change happen (empowerment).

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) evolved out of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and provided a wealth of methodological suggestions for enhancing dialogue and praxis and, to a lesser extent, conscientisation. *'When facilitated well primacy was accorded to the expression of their emic realities by lowers minimising the imposition of the etic frames of meaning of uppers'* (Chambers, 2007). As Jennings (2000) puts it, *'ultimately, participatory development is driven by a belief in the importance of entrusting citizens with the responsibility to shape their own future'.*

During the 1990s even neo-liberal orthodoxy championed participation. Unsurprisingly, it adopted it with its own spin promoting the concept of the beneficiary as the 'consumer' and endorsing participation as a means to increase efficiencies, effectiveness and sustainability (e.g. *'Public participation supports poverty reduction by creating more effective, equitable and sustainable activities'* ADB, 2007). Empowerment was thus seen in terms of giving clients freedom of choice and agency to make demands of the market.

Thus, the 1990s saw participation as desirable by sociologists and economists alike. Where they differ is in the outcomes sought and thus the emphasis given to the processes of participation. Whereas economists herald greater efficiencies (*'the vast networks, socially beneficial aims and grassroots knowledge of civil society organisations help ADB formulate and deliver its pro-poor development assistance more effectively to developing countries'* (ADB, 2007)), sociologists tend to support the intrinsic rights of people to participate and the concomitant empowerment such participation promotes. Parfitt (2004) typifies this difference in

the emphasis given to participation as a means versus participation as an end.'

Whatever the motivation to promote participation, by the end of the 1990s participatory development had become mainstream. Cooke and Kothari's publication *'Participation: the New Tyranny'* (2001) challenged the participation ideology suggesting that it displaced legitimate forms of representation, could be easily 'facipulated' (outcomes managed and manipulated by external facilitators) and favoured the local regardless of unequal local power relations that often led to the capture of benefits. The *'participation by command'* culture that had evolved was criticised as a technocratic solution to what is a much more fundamental problem of power relations and political influence. Hickey and Mohan (2005) argued, however, that the participation at the heart of Cooke and Kothari's criticism is a narrow reductionist form promoted by development agencies which does not embrace the full gambit of political ramifications. Despite the rhetoric which might imply otherwise, participation has been reduced by them to a means (see above, to achieve greater efficiencies and effectiveness) when, in fact, participation is also an end in itself as manifest in the outcome of empowerment (Oakley et al, 2002). *'It should be clear that participation as a means has quite different implications than participation as an end...Whereas participation as a means is politically neutral insofar as it does not address such power differentials, participation as an end has an emancipatory, politically-radical component in that it seeks to address unequal power relations'* (Parfitt, 2004).

The current emerging participatory governance agenda pushes the idea that participation is not merely a box to be ticked to support and rationalise development agency intervention, but a political process with transformative potential. It complements the contemporary discourse around the rights-based approach, which has gathered momentum since 1995. *It 'empowers people to claim and exercise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities'* (CARE 2005), and goes *'beyond participation of clients and beneficiaries, such programmes empower people to take control over their own lives as an integral part of understanding development and dignity as a basic human right.'* The rights-based approach thus provides an opportunity to re-politicise development in a context where participation had been co-opted and manipulated by neo-liberals. The rights-based approach describes a particular form of participation, which addresses the criticisms that *'(beneficiary) participation'* did not sufficiently address power relations. The rights-based approach puts the onus on rights holders to exert agency and claim rights, something social

movements have been doing long before this current interest, and thus contributes to the widest definitions of empowerment.

From the perspectives of many donors, rights-based approaches can fill the gap when it comes to requiring government accountability. The pledges to increase development aid resulting from the Millennium Declaration (dubbed the *'more with less'* agenda) have necessitated more co-financing arrangements and more direct sector and direct budget support to governments. This has, in turn, precipitated the donor interest in 'good governance' largely as a means to provide the checks and balances for state spending of vast sums of money channelled to it through increased direct aid and loans. Citizens are required to act as watchdogs and demand accountability and transparency from the state for the use of these funds. The good governance agenda thus neatly transfers the responsibility for monitoring and control from the donor to civil society. This is all couched in terms of rights, the claiming of rights and the responsibilities of duty bearers to address these claims. Just as neo-liberalism and participatory development converged in the 1990s, the good governance agenda and participation are now converging. Once again, the motivations behind these are very different and many view the promotion of good governance as a further manifestation of neo-liberal thinking, albeit one which has been *'softened'* (Mohan and Stokke, 2005: p. 255). This leaves many wondering whether development agencies have appropriated the rights agenda for their own ends. If this is the case, it will affect the way rights-based approaches are monitored and evaluated.

With the rise of interest in the rights-based approach, participation is now being re-located within the citizenship debate. *'Citizenship can be claimed from below through the efforts of the marginalised in organised struggles rather than waiting for it to be conferred from above* (Hickey and Mohan, 2005). The citizen-state interface is being championed as a key element of good governance and depends not only on the opportunities provided for interface but also on an active (or empowered) citizenry.

So all this means that different stakeholders have, and continue to search for, different indicators to prove the efficacy of participatory development, rights-based approaches and to demand-side governance and empowered citizenry as the following table illustrates.

Table 2. Examples of different factors which may be important to different stakeholders

ISSUE	PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY	INTERMEDIARY	DONOR
Participation	Who is included/excluded, who can talk and be listened to, when can they participate directly/ through brokers (i.e. the process).	Number and range of opportunities for participation by people living in poverty or their representatives.	Gender disaggregated numbers of people living in poverty or their representatives at meetings, training, providing labour (quantitative outputs).
Accountability	Accessing claimed entitlements.	Return on donor investment – upwards accountability.	Financial management, e.g. school stipends getting through to intended beneficiaries with minimal corruption. Efficiency measures of good governance.
Rights	Fair treatment by service providers, respect.	Enhanced voice of a united civil society.	Democratisation; in particular free and fair elections.
Poverty reduction	Eating three meals every day. Affording children's education.	Improved livelihoods.	Meeting the MDG targets.
Citizenship	Respected and valued. Life with dignity.	Legal provisions, exercise of franchise, etc.	Active citizenry; counter balance to state.
Empowerment	Belief that they have the trust, respect and means to influence decisions which affect them.	People living in poverty can exercise their rights .	Empowered electorate holding Government to account. Responsible citizenry taking action for their own benefit.

Earl et al (2001) define outcomes as '*changes in the behaviour, relation-ships, activities, or actions of the people, groups, and organizations with whom the programme has engaged, both directly and in terms of opportunities for wider influence'.* As far as empowerment is concerned the outcomes of par-ticipation and rights-based programmes would embrace the range of different perspectives suggested in the table above, i.e. the behaviour of people living in poverty and services providers, relationships (including the trust, respect qualities of the relationships) and actions (exercising rights, holding service providers account, etc.). The chal-lenge is to have a monitoring system that reconciles these different perspectives. Approaches to measurement should thus consider how all these different elements can be included.

> *We need to let the people become the subjects not the objects of monitoring.*

Taylor (2000) cautions that *'the art of measuring someone else's empower-ment is potentially disempowering'* and goes on to state *'the measurement of empowerment must not be allowed to become something that the more powerful do to the less powerful'.* Mayoux (2008) notes that *'the selection of any particu-lar set of indicators... is inevitably based on underlying theoretical, and often political, understanding of what types of impacts are important'.* Both are warning that we must recognise that the measurement of empower-ment is value-driven. Such different perspectives cannot be recon-ciled by monitoring empowerment only from the perspective of the outsider. This will not be useful for those whose empowerment is being monitored and it is not empowering! Both the selection of indi-cators and the means to measure them have very different normative characteristics depending on how one views empowerment. The approach developed by the Social Movement in Bangladesh dis-cussed in this paper makes the case that to avoid imposing an exter-nal framework, outsiders can use the empowerment information *after* it has been generated and used first and foremost by the people themselves.

Obviously, with such a wide variety of definitions, attempts to measure empowerment have been complicated and have often fallen short of the range of expectations. Empowerment measures general-ly fall into two categories; ones which enable comparison of coun-tries and regions and ones which are used at programme level to understand the process and outcomes of empowerment strategies.

Many of the early attempts to measure empowerment were related to the empowerment of women. For example, in the 1990s, CIDA introduced its own set of indicators of empowerment covering legal, political, economic and social empowerment comprising such measures as the *'rate at which the number of women/men in the local police by rank is increasing, percentage of government seats held by women in local councils/decision making bodies, percentage of available credit, financial and technical support services going to men/women, mobility of women within and outside their residential locality as compared to men.'* These quantitative indicators were supplemented by qualitative enquiry to establish women's awareness of local politics and their legal rights, their perceptions of the process of empowerment and independence. These measures were supposed to be universally applicable and so are an example of the first category.

More recently, Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) have made what is arguably the most ambitious effort to provide a set of indicators that can be used universally. They promote the idea of Degrees of Empowerment based on the concepts of *opportunity, use of the opportunity* and *outcome.* This framework owes its origins to Kabeer (2001) who identified access to resources, agency and outcome (achievements) as three essential elements of empowerment. Thus are example of the way questions are framed by Alsop and Heinsohn in the survey instrument proposed in 'Measuring Empowerment in Practice' is *(i) do elections exist* (opportunity) *(ii) do women try to vote* (agency) *(iii) do women actually vote* (outcome). Like CIDA's tool, this is also designed to compare the state of empowerment across countries and regions and is thus based on a normative set of indicators. Whilst these may have important value, they nevertheless assume a sequential path for empowerment and universality of definition of what it is to be empowered. Like all uniform measures it allows somewhat broad brush comparisons.

By contrast, measurement of empowerment within programmes can include a range of approaches that can look at outcomes (as defined above) in a variety of qualitative and quantitative ways. But the state of the art is under-developed and largely regarded as unsatisfactory as the following quote suggests. *'Investors and funders are, on the whole, very aware that the information they receive by way of report does not tell them much about what an organisation is actually achieving'* (Pearce and Kay, 2008). Social Accounting has emerged as one approach to try to demonstrate social value and meet the need of funders for more robust reporting. Social Accounting falls into two camps. The first, the Social Accounting and Auditing approach, favours the use of

stakeholders' 'stories' to describe outcomes, including empowerment. The Social Return on Investment approach, stresses the importance of monetising impact. One of the chief criticisms of the latter approach is that it is likely to make the process *'funder and investor led'* (Pearce and Kay, 2008). The Social Audit Network promotes the former, encouraging organisations to examine what the organisation does through consultation and listening to what others say about it. The New Economics Forum has attempted to aid credibility in social accounting by providing an online public access toolkit (www. proveandimprove.org), which lists sample social indicators, such as *'people feel critically engaged/involved in their community'* with a range of possible answers such as *'well-informed'*, *'can influence'* and *'feels others in the community can influence'*.

Recognising the problems of outside biases in developing evaluation frameworks, many attempts have been made to ensure that data and analyses are generated at the grassroots level. Anirudh Krishna (2005), for example, promotes this idea in his Stages of Progress methodology, which analyses community and household poverty dynamics and claims it is community-led. However, he starts his methodological guidelines with *'Step 1': assemble a diverse and representative community group'*. You may ask who *'assembles'* the meeting? Who decides whether the community group is *diverse* enough or *representative* enough? Such power dynamics must affect the outcome of the analyses. The topics discussed will be seen from the perspective of those 'chosen' to participate. We therefore have to be cautious about using the phrase 'community-led'.

Hashem and Schuler (1993) also recognised that women's own views on what constituted empowerment were essential and thus based their measurement of empowerment on the results of in-depth interviews and participant observation on a random selected sample.[3] These led to the definition of a lengthy list of questions centred around six dimensions; *sense of self and vision of the future, mobility and visibility, economic security, decision-making power in the household, participation in non-family groups and interest and effectiveness in the public sphere.* For example, comments which contributed to defining the first dimension *'sense of self and vision for the future'* included *'not crossing the road when a man appears'*, *'not hiding behind her saree or burka'*, *'talking directly with men and outsiders'*, *'looking at men and outsiders in the eye rather than looking down'*. These statements were then translated into a series of questions and questionnaires,

3   Of women in rural Bangladesh.

which could be used across different locations in a conventional survey. Here, at least, the norms are defined by those who are experiencing empowerment, but the fact that empowerment is a moving target has not been taken into consideration.

Longitudinal studies to measure empowerment are thus particularly problematic, as Malhotra et al (2002) state; *'behavioural and normative priorities which define appropriate indicators for measuring empowerment are constantly evolving'* thus making comparisons over time equivocal. Krishna's (2005) community-led Stages of Progress methodology mentioned above recognises the context-specific nature (in this case of poverty) by using focus group meetings to define the stages that poor households typically follow as they make their way out of poverty. These stages are then used to create a 'yardstick' by which households' well-being can be measured at different points in time. Whilst this method and that of Hashemi and Schuler go a long way towards acknowledging and embracing context-specific differences and the process nature of change, the statements defining the stages of progress are fixed from one session to the next. They do not then accommodate the possibility that people's perceptions of poverty or empowerment might change.

The challenges to measure empowerment are thus enormous. The main challenges are summarised below with comments on how these challenges can be addressed.

EMPOWERMENT IS A CONTESTED CONCEPT

Empowerment is a value-laden concept. Different views are shaped by experience and normative beliefs. Different expectations (of end results of an empowerment process) mean that outcome measures are the only ones which can begin to satisfy different stakeholders. However, what are considered significant outcomes will vary widely across different perspectives. What everyone agrees on is that empowerment is a process. While the nature of the process may be quite different, a positive process of empowerment or a negative process of disempowerment can be recognised. If we let those being empowered define what this means to them (so they are no longer contested by external presumption), tracking both positive and negative change can be valuable and comparable.

EMPOWERMENT IS A MOVING TARGET

The changing context both in terms of enabling/limiting changes in environment and behaviour at societal and individual levels means that the idea of what it means to be empowered will constantly shift. If we can track empowerment as a process of change rather than a set of finite end results, this challenge can be largely addressed.

ATTEMPTS TO MEASURE EMPOWERMENT LACK RIGOUR

This refers to the ongoing debate about the level of rigour that can be attached to the measurement of social phenomena. It is acknowledged that any proposed solution will be imperfect and subject to further challenges. However, amongst the many options, some may be useful, and those are the ones that need to be identified, tried, and improved upon. Carlos Barahona writes that *'rigour is derived from a series of linked stages in the measurement process. If these can be fulfilled then rigour can be inferred'* These stages are as follows:

1. *Conceptualisation of what is to be measured.* This establishes the premises on which the measuring process is based. The answers to the two challenges described above are an important part of the process of attaching rigour to measuring empowerment. While no perfect solution will be found, these premises should at least be tenable in relation to the use for which the measurements of empowerment are intended.

2. Devising a method for measurement that is *well-defined, repeatable, and transparent.* This method should aim to minimise biases and yield a level of accuracy that is sufficient to make the measures useful. The method should also be susceptible to the scrutiny of those who are interested in using the resulting measurements.

3. The reliability and validity of the resulting measurements must be assessed. This means that it should be demonstrated that *repeated measurements yield consistent results,* that these are meaningful within their context, that they correlate to other assessments of the same concept and that they are useful in making generalisations.

4. *Analysis of the measurements is possible* through established methods for data processing, mainly through the use of statistical techniques that allow the estimation of characteristics of the population, measurement of variability and precision and formal testing of the hypothesis.

3 The Challenge for Social Movements

One of the key differences between donor discourses on rights is that develop-ment actors are generally motivated by what is the perceived need for develop-ment to which rights are framed as a solution. In contrast, social mobilisa-tions around rights do not necessarily take the need for development as their starting point. Many (...) are concerned with broad goals of social justice, access to economic resources, political change and empowerment (Pettit and Wheeler, 2005).

As many donors seek to diversify their operating partnerships to pro-mote democratic principles and bolster civic engagement with the State, they are increasingly initiating work with non-NGO partners, including social movements, trade unions, faith-based groups and other interest groups. These groups are motivated and driven by intrinsic need and their own dynamic. Issues for action often emerge spontaneously, propelled by a feeling of injustice and often involving protest to oppose this injustice. They do not emerge as a response to outsiders' initiatives, fund availability or fund chasing and their prime thrust is not service provision. They are thus *very different* from traditional NGOs, although often local legislation requires them to be registered as NGOs. The traditional NGOs, which proliferated over the last three decades, have largely been service providers (e.g. credit, extension, health clinics, non-formal education, etc). As such they adapted well to donor demands of logical frameworks and results-based monitoring, which favour reporting on quantitative outputs. In contrast, as one donor representative told me, 'these oth-er organisations are no doubt of huge significance but they are all over the place. How could we track investment when they change their minds what they want to do all the time?'

The Social Movement in Bangladesh suffered many years of donors' inability to understand the difference between the NGOs they were used to working with and this movement of activists. The donors tried to impose logical frameworks and standard monitoring and evaluation approaches but the Movement resisted. This resist-ance was not just a clash of ideology but also brought into sharp focus the problem others were beginning to face; of measuring advo-

cacy and rights-claiming behaviour. Some NGOs which had started to adopt the rights-based approach were also struggling to find ways to report on change, which rarely seemed to follow linear logic. The nature of rights claiming and advocacy is necessarily opportunistic – people agitate around issues which concern them deeply and these cannot be externally prescribed, either in terms of what will be championed or when.

It is this challenge of monitoring a social movement, raised initially by donors, that has led us to help create an approach which is, first and foremost, of interest and use to the Movement members and embodies the spirit of a movement (contesting over issues which are the members' own priorities). This is a fundamental and non-negotiable core of the approach. As the approach and its potential for providing the kinds of information required for programmes and funding developed, it gradually occurred to us that it was just one which was suitable for social movements but could also be applied to NGOs truly engaged in promoting rights-based approaches.

4 The Evolution of this Empowerment Measuring Tool

Now, let us go back to the beginning and the emergence of the member-led monitoring system to understand why it is so significant.

In the late 1990s, the Movement's work attracted donor interest as a result of the aid industry´s increasing disenchantment with structuralism and a stated intent to seek more people-centred and rights-based approaches for aid support. This Movement was an indigenous grassroots organisation, which was dealing head on with rights abuses and the struggle to secure land rights. It was just the sort of organisation donors were looking for. However, the procedures to enable donors to channel funds to such an organisation placed demands on the essentially informal organisation which, as a people's movement, it had hitherto felt unnecessary.

The monitoring and evaluation systems operating in the Movement were quite basic. In fact, it had been noted in the 2001 Plan for Expansion that the Movement had previously had a *'reduced need and incentive for conventional and professionalised monitoring'* and its hitherto small-scale and project-based financing had operated with only *'schematic and (largely quantitative) reporting requirements'*. The Plan concluded that *'the scale of the proposed expansion, funding and management challenges over the next seven years implies a need for a significant shift in the quality, regularity and coverage of monitoring information.'*

But herein lies the dilemma. Most of the donors were interested in the Movement because it tackled land rights issues and there was a clear correlation between land acquisition and economic advancement through productive use of the acquired land. The correlation provided a level of comfort and a means to appease bureaucrats still ill at ease with the notion that rights-based programmes were largely considered to have 'non-quantifiable' outcomes. The Movement's land rights programme could, they suggested, be measured through conventional economic rates of return. But (and this is an important 'but'), not all the Movement's groups got access to land and this did not seem to affect the enthusiasm with which groups continued to meet and be active. Belonging to the Movement was apparently *important irrespective of gains made in land acquisition.*

BOX 2 A SHORT HISTORY OF THIS SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The Movement described itself as an organisation of the landless poor, which started its activities as a Youth Organisation supported by Freedom Fighters and Social Workers more than thirty years ago. Originally in essence a cultural and leisure group, it gradually started to undertake voluntary activities within the community. Its very first success was to raise funds to buy land to make a simple walkway access to the main road when it had been prohibited by the landowner. It then became involved in monitoring other injustices and won a local media prize for bringing legal action against people hijacking electricity. Inspired by these successes they started to focus more on development activities, including fish cultivation and establishing a rice mill. However, they felt that the rich continued to benefit from their success rather than the poor. To redress this they stepped up their fight against injustice and, following registration with the Ministry of Social Welfare, started mobilisation activities in 1983. Local research indicated that several hundred acres of khas land (Government land intended to be used as common land for the use of the poor) had been appropriated by wealthy land owners. The fledgling Movement identified this khas land issue as a vital one to establish the rights of the poor. The ensuing struggles were confrontational and resulted in deaths and imprisonment as well as continuing harassment.

The Movement continued to champion the rights of the poor to khas land and other khas resources (e.g. water bodies) and to mobilise groups to realise their entitlements. It spread rapidly and now operates directly or through its network of partners in twenty two of the sixty four districts of Bangladesh, with over 543 thousand members. It has recovered nearly 100 thousand acres of khas land and water bodies (June, 2007).

To this day, less than one third of the groups[4] have acquired khas resources[5] and yet they still meet without external assistance or insistence week in week out and have done so for up to twenty years. Why were they doing this? What benefits were being derived? Nobody living in poverty with the exigencies this state imposes would give up valuable time to meet if there weren't important benefits. It was clear that neither the donors nor the organisation itself knew what these benefits really were. Calculation of a rate of return on donors' investment, which relied solely on the acquisition of khas resources and the eco-

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4   Total number of groups in 2007 was 27,280.
5   Government land or water bodies intended to be used as common property for the use of the poor but usually appropriated by 'land grabbers'.

nomic benefits accrued through its productive use, would clearly be a gross underestimate of the value of the membership of the Movement. But these other benefits would have to be quantifiable in some way. An expanded monitoring system was called for.

From the outset, the Movement insisted that the monitoring system should be driven by its members and should be intrinsically useful for them. It fiercely resisted being categorised as a non-government organisation and subject to log frame driven normative target-setting. It was only too aware that change happened as a result of a constellation of factors at the local level and was driven primarily by the response of the members to those constellations and not by extrinsic interventions. The answer proposed by the consultants was to undertake a 'participatory grassroots review' (PGR) which they suggested *'will provide insights as to how to assess quality issues over the coming years of expansion'.* They were, in effect, saying that the complexity of the context-specific nature of the Movement's empowerment was impossible to quantify and a second best would be to capture broad qualitative data which would illustrate the diversity of these changes. These would draw on case studies and stories that would supplement what was considered to be the more robust economic data, derived from productive land use. The principles for the monitoring and evaluation system were recommended to be *'focused learning rather than quantitative targets'.*

In 2003, the PGR was undertaken as suggested by the design consultants with external facilitators using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques with thirty purposively selected groups. Little did they know that this work would lead to establishing a robust quantitative monitoring and evaluation tool.

An international consultant led the initial scoping phase of the review. This involved exploring issues concerning the Movement with a wide range of stakeholders. This approach drew on the current practice of participatory evaluation, which sought input in defining areas of enquiry for evaluation from 'beneficiaries' and 'non-beneficiaries' as well as 'service providers' and 'donors'. The areas for review suggested by the design consultants were; membership characteristics, leadership and group cohesion, collective action and wider networking, autonomy and maturity and key benefits achieved.

The somewhat conventional participatory process of review yielded important insights. For example, the idea of *'autonomy'*, an area of enquiry suggested by external consultants, had no resonance with the members of a Movement where solidarity and collective action

are cornerstones of its raison d'être. This concept of autonomy had come from the consultants' experience with NGO group development process, where, at some point, groups are expected to 'graduate' and become independent. The members suggested that *'sustainability and maturity'* of the group were more appropriate areas for review. Here was a classic example of the importance of participatory development of indicators. A small but hugely significant point, this modification sowed the seeds of doubt among the review team members and the organisation itself regarding the appropriateness of outsiders suggesting areas for evaluation. Much more familiar with NGO operations, nobody involved had any experience with Movements, let alone trying to evaluate the activities and outcomes of Movement membership. The team entrusted with developing the Monitoring and Evaluation System had the good sense not to bluff their way through but to admit they knew nothing and this led to the real breakthrough. They would have to rely totally on the Movement membership to explain why they felt membership was so important to them and what benefits accrued. This was not participatory development of a monitoring and evaluation system by consultation. Rather, the development of the system was to be led by the perceptions and opinions of the members.

> *The team entrusted with developing the monitoring and evaluation system had the good sense not to bluff their way through but to admit they knew nothing and this led to the real breakthrough.*

The team adjusted to the realisation that this grassroots review was to be an open–ended listening study and developed with stakeholders a series of open-ended questions with a particular emphasis on 'how?' and 'why?'. The team then selected participatory tools from the family of PRA methods known to work in Bangladesh. These included the mood meter, well-being analysis, scoring, network mapping, timelines, flow diagrams, drawings and drama.

Sampling was purposive and designed to include the major variables in the Movement's operating landscape. Fifty percent of the twelve operating areas were selected, thus providing a representation of a range of areas; remote areas and charland[6], new and old Move-

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6   Charland comprises riverine land masses subject to constant erosion and
    shifting.

ment areas; those with higher concentrations of Hindu groups or tribal groups. There was concern that a sample of 30 groups (as recommended by the TOR) from a total of 4,446[7] at the time was too small a sample but finally it was decided that in-depth discussions with groups could be held if the sample size remained small and this would ultimately be more useful for the purpose.

The process was different from other reviews; in the words of one of the staff *'this was totally their (the members') analysis. The tools used allowed them to analyse for themselves. The expectation to please the evaluator and not wanting to hurt the field worker was totally absent. This was their analysis for their own use'.* Another staff member commented, *'using only visual materials and local language meant that real information emerged'.* As an open–ended listening study, there was no external agenda or *'facipulation'.*[8] The groups talked about what benefits they currently felt from Movement membership, what it was like before they joined the Movement, what they expected to achieve in the future as members of the Movement, and what disappointed them about membership. They discussed the operating structure of the Movement as well as the internal communication and planning processes. They also discussed their relationship with different parts of the Movement as well as their relationship with outside agencies, key persons in the community and their internal family relations.

Many comments were made which surprised the Movement's salaried staff. Both the research team and Movement staff were struck by the range of activities taking place and the diverse nature of benefits perceived by members. For example, members were actively seeking out their elected local government representatives to raise issues, they were taking absent teachers to task, were supporting their own members through crises and preferentially providing them loans from group savings, women were regarded as their husbands 'friends' (rather than possessions) and decisions were increasingly being taken together. The sense of solidarity and collective strength had emboldened members to both take action and to evolve new patterns of social norms. This was empowerment where staff had felt that dependencies on them still predominated.[9]

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7   At March 2003.

8   Facipulation is a term coined from a combination of facilitation and manipulation, which implies that participatory processes are "massaged" to generate outcomes designed by outsiders or those with more power.

9   Staff were not just surprised but a little fearful that they would soon be redundant!

The PGR generated more than 8,000 key statements from groups and committees within the Movement. As far as possible these statements were a reflection of the exact words used by the group and were not overlain with facilitator interpretation. The statements described the benefits and difficulties faced in relation to the topic areas developed in the consultations (cohesion, membership, leadership, decision-making, networking, resource mobilisation, awareness, governance, sustainability/maturity and gender).

Sifting through these 8,000 statements led the research team to cluster similar and related ideas and gradually patterns emerged. Benefits seemed to fall naturally into four categories;

1. those to do with the group's and individual members of the group's feeling of enhanced power, ability to present their own views and negotiate for their own ends in formal and informal decision-making,
2. those to do with mutual support, trust, respect and equity,
3. those to do with access and use of economic resources (khas resources, savings, technical resources, etc).
4. those to do with the group's own capability and independence.

Shorthand labels were given to the categories;

1. political,
2. social,
3. economic and natural resources,
4. capability.

The statements were turned into the language of indicators. The following table provides some examples of the re-wording based on a synthesis of a number of statements. These indicators were then checked back with the Movement members to ensure that they reflected exactly the sentiments they had talked about in the open-ended PGR discussions.

Table 3 A few examples of how statements gathered during the participatory grassroots review were used to formulate indicators[10]

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES OF ORIGINAL STATEMENT	INDICATOR STATEMENT
Political	We now know how the Union Parishad (lowest tier of local government) works/we can name all the ward members and what they do and don't do.	All group members can describe the structure and function of the Union Parishad.
	The elites allow us to take part in shalish (local court) discussions because we are members of the movement/the community gives us importance as they now call us to the shalish/we can now speak out.	Group members who are participating in the Shalish actively influence decisions.
	The UP chairman behaves well with us/UP[11] member visits and exchanges greeting with us/UP member is in constant touch with group/get information from UP member about government facilities for poor.	Group makes regular contact with the UP member.
	Group members are involved in school management committees/taking part to solve problems through committee membership/ensure school teachers take classes regularly and properly teach the children /our opinion is taken seriously/been able to get children's stipend from school/we go to the school to see whether our children are studying well.	Group has member on school management committee. All group members know where to go to raise complaints (about education rights). Evidence that committee has taken decisions in favour of the poor as a result of the group's influence.
	We have elected own members in UP elections/to get into local power structure/we have now realized the necessity of electing representative of the poor to the local power structure/not yet in power structure.	Movement representative on the UP.

10 Because 8,000 statements were reviewed to formulate an indicator, the connection is not always so clear in these few examples. Also, these statements may influence the formulation of more than one indicator.

11 Union Parishad – currently lowest elected tier of local government, with an average constituency size of 30,000.

Economic and natural resources	We can collect information about khas land from land office ourselves/we have no idea about the persons to contact in the process of getting land.	Group knows where to get information from Union Land Office. Group has made an application for land following the prescribed procedure.
	With loans from our savings, purchased paddy, starting cow rearing, petty business, purchased van, opened tea shop, leased land, taking up collective projects/ we can ourselves take decision about savings for profitable investment.	Loans provided by the group by investment type. All group members are satisfied with how savings are invested (as a result of joint decisions).
Social	Members are united in assisting a fellow member in his days of crisis / extend a helping hand when one is in need/tendency to help others is growing.	Evidence of the group successfully helping a group member in need. Evidence of the group sharing and ensuring the most needy in the group get benefits.
	Used to take more care of boys/ both sons and daughters are given the same kind of food/used not to treat sons and daughters the same/ encourage girls' education.	Position of women and girls in all the group member's families is valued.
Capability	We resolve conflict among members/ can discuss about group members' problems/we have no idea about problem solving/conflict amongst ourselves has decreased.	This group's leaders can mediate conflict within the group. All group members feel able to openly express their opinions.
	We cannot hold meetings by ourselves/we cannot maintain group accounts/we cannot write records of meetings/we want to accomplish all activities without workers' (Movement staff) assistance./we need to be taught about how other offices work.	The group leaders organise routine activities of the group without Movement staff Group keeps its own accounts ledger. The group has found a way[12] to record all decisions and key issues in writing in situ without relying on the Movement staff.

12 This formulation is due to the fact that the group may not have any literate members. They may call on someone in the community (e.g. their school-attending phrase is 'school-going' children) to take notes and read them back to them.

As well as these four categories, there was a clear emergence of the idea that the statements represented different levels of maturity within these categories. For example, older groups were talking about taking part in the local court and solving their own family and Movement-related problems while newer groups needed Movement field staff to help them run meetings, take decisions and broker relations. Another emerging pattern was one of increasing competence and decreasing dependency on field staff, as well as increasing demonstration of the group's own agency.

The four categories of statements were thus further categorised by three levels of developmental progression; i. awareness, ii. confidence and capability, and iii. effectiveness and self-sustaining. Thus, statements for the political category (political capital accumulation/political empowerment) were clustered according to the level of competence demonstrated as indicated in the limited[13] example below.

Awareness
'All group members can describe the structure and function of the Union Parishad' (lowest tier of local government).

Confidence and capability
'Group makes regular contact with the Union Parishad'.

'Group asks their local elected members of the Union Parishad to raise issues on their behalf.

Effectiveness and self-sustaining
'Group [directly] checks whether the Union Parishad-administered allocations for the poor are complied with, and does this without the assistance of the field officer'.

This development progression index was given the English acronym ACCESS (Awareness (A), Confidence and Capability (CC) and Effectiveness and Self Sustaining (ESS), a term only used by the programme and its funders.

A total of 132 indicators (synthesised from the more than 8,000 statements) were assembled in a grid as follows. There was no attempt to have the same number of indicators in each category as

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13 For ease of reading, only one or two statements have been given as examples – each category has a larger number of statements (see table 2).

this would not have reflected on how the members saw their empowerment.

Table 4 Distribution of indicators across categories

	AWARENESS	CONFIDENCE AND CAPABILITY	EFFECTIVENESS AND SELF-SUSTAINING
(Group) Political Development	17 Indicators	13 Indicators	14 Indicators
(Group) Social development	11 Indicators	10 Indicators	11 Indicators
(Group) Economic and natural resource development	9 Indicators	8 Indicators	10 Indicators
(Group) Capability	7 Indicators	12 Indicators	10 Indicators

Further review of the nature of statements emanating from the different age categories of a group led to the realisation that a time scale for each development category could be applied. Thus, the figures analysed in 2005 showed that it took a group on average between two and three years to reach Awareness level (i.e. knowing how the Movement was set up, what rights members were entitled to, what routes were possible to exercise their rights), a further three to four years for a group to reach Confidence and Capability level (i.e. beginning to plan to take action and work together to realise some rights), and another three to four years to reach the final category of Effectiveness and Self-sustainability (i.e. where the group has autonomy from the Mother organisation and can manage itself and influence others). This suggests a total time period, from formation of the group to feelings of 'effectiveness', of between eight to eleven years. None of the groups, even those formed more than 20 years ago, scored 100 percent.

Large charts were made that listed the 132 indicators. It was proposed that each year each group would sit together with a facilitator to review each statement. Each indicator would be read out to them and scored as *'yes, we have achieved this'* or *'no, we have not achieved this'* by using a *'happy'* face symbol or *'unhappy'* face symbol. The pilot with 60 groups, as indicated by comments made by staff and facilitators in a post-pilot review, proved extremely successful;

• the self-assessment confers ownership, group members like evaluating themselves, gain more from it than being evaluated from outside.

- group members were felt to be the main beneficiaries of the assessment process. They were able to see how far they had come, celebrate success but were also able to see shortcomings and what they needed to do in the future to improve. They saw a direct link between the assessment and future planning.
- there is less possibility of manipulating data than when the evaluation is staff-led. All group members were fully-involved and signed off on the final assessment sheet.
- it was reported that groups, even struggling and weak ones, became energised by the assessment process. Their confidence was built and priorities for future action clarified.

The next challenge was to *scale it up!*

5 How this Monitoring Tool Works

Figure 7. A Women's group involved in a reflection session

As far as they are concerned the process is one that they drive and own and is purely for their purposes. For them the analysis stops here.

At the group level: The groups meet to review the statements once every year. In this movement the men and women meet separately. They sit at times which are convenient for them, the men preferring the evening and the women the afternoon. They organise some snacks and make an occasion of the session. The review process takes about three hours.

A facilitator helps the process. He/she is a Movement member from another group and has been mentored to manage the process and ensure that the group engages in the evaluation properly.

The facilitator reads out each statement and the group discusses whether it applies to them or not. They are encouraged by the facilitator to explore what the statement means and must use examples to help them to assess their own achievement. For instance, in discussing whether they have achieved the indicator, *'the position of women and girls in all group members' families is valued'* (an 'awareness' level indicator), examples are provided by each member. Such examples as *'we all eat together', 'both girls and boys have time set aside to do school homework', ' mothers don't only eat the fish head as they had to before'*, etc. lead to extensive discussion before finally, the group members assign a 'happy face' or an 'unhappy face' to the statement. Any reluctance to score a 'happy face' is automatically scored as an 'unhappy face'. The fact that all the group members have to put forward their opinion and provide evidence to support this encourages joint analysis and mutual support.

As far as the group is concerned, their main motivation is to eventually be able to insert 'happy faces' in all the boxes. They take the exercise very seriously and where there are 'unhappy faces', take stock and reflect on what the group must do in the following year to improve on this. [14]

> We talked with a men's group that had been in existence for more than 20 years about their experience of using the reflection tool. 'It took about 3 hours to complete, but it will take less next time. We thought it was time well spent. The facilitator is a member of the Movement and this is good because he uses language we can understand. He also has more time for us. We get a feeling that we are doing this ourselves, not top-down. We still have not got 'full marks' – we will try to get this next year and then we can help other groups. The process is very important – it is like looking in a mirror. When we find out what we have not been able to achieve we make a plan to take action. We have been a group for nearly 23 years and if we had done this before it would have made a big difference. We would have been able to pick up on our shortcomings earlier.' April 2007

They develop an action plan for the following year based on their analyses and scores. They regard this reflection process as an important milestone each year and look forward to it. It is not used to compare themselves with another group or as a means to access resources, but purely as a self-assessment tool that encourages reflection and defines future action.

For others (external to the group) wanting to monitor performance and investment, the analysis goes further.

At the organisational level: Copies of the results recorded on each chart are taken by the supporting organisation (with the agreement of the group) and collated. Each positive assessment of an indicator or closely-related set of indicators is then weighted depending on whether it represents the A (awareness), CC (confidence and capability) or ESS (effectiveness and self-sustaining) level of achievement. The idea behind the weighting of these indicators is the recognition that certain indicators have greater value than others. It also allows for the fact that different groups progress at different rates. For

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14 Anecdotal information suggests that since undertaking this yearly assessment, the actual rate at which groups progress is faster than before. Staff feel this is because the group is more focused and aware of its shortcomings and knows that other groups have been able to make these achievements.

example, a particular group may have faced a situation involving the denial of certain rights and taken action (confidence and capability) but might not know how to tackle other obstacles to rights realisation (awareness). This group would score higher for its experience of an actual situation than a group which only achieved awareness but its lack of knowledge in some areas would be evident from its scoring on other indicators. Indicators of awareness are not weighted whereas indicators for confidence and capability are weighted with a factor of 2 and indicators for effectiveness and self-sustaining with a factor of 3. This is shown in Table 5 which also indicates the maximum scores achieved.

Table 5 How scores were weighted

Categories of empowerment / Level of achievement	Awareness	Confidence and capability	Effectiveness and self-sustaining
(Group) Political development	Score 6	Score 12	Score 18
(Group) Social development	Score 5	Score 10	Score 15
(Group) Economic and natural resource development	Score 3	Score 6	Score 9
(Group) Capability	Score 3	Score 6	Score 9
Total possible	Total 17	Total 34	Score 51

An overall Group Development Index (GDI) can be calculated that combines information from the four categories. This is a composite numerical score which usefully accommodates multiple largely qualitative indicators. Thus the GDI can be calculated for each group. Group GDIs can also be aggregated by age of group, area office, geographic area, gender or other variables, which might be of interest to compare (e.g. with/without other kinds of support, such as locally mobilised women's action groups). The Movement staff can track the composite GDI as well as the individual indices (political, social, economic/natural resource development and capability indices) from which it is derived.

An important aspect of the weighting of scores recognises that groups do not necessarily follow the same path of development. As in all Movements, member sub-groups develop intrinsically as a result of what its members want it to do and the context in which it operates (and, by implication the issues and confrontations it may face). Some groups will face struggles against land grabbers, others might

face problems with the distribution of relief resources and others might face problems of internal co-operation. It is likely that the experience gained from dealing with these will result in enhanced scores in some areas but in slightly lower scores in other areas. All groups will not only have their own expertise shaped by circumstances but will also progress at a different pace depending on the dynamics of the group. There is no blueprint for progression but rather recognition of difference. This difference does not, however, affect the overall GDI trends, which will show progression irrespective of the nature of that progression. Furthermore, the approach enables monitoring of exceptional progress as all the indicators in all development categories are reviewed every year. So, for example, a young group with a score within 'Awareness level' (i.e. around 17) might, in fact, have a fairly highly-developed political competency beyond Awareness level (some indicators with weighted scores), but shortfalls in some awareness level indicators.

Not only does the GDI provide information about the pace and quality of development of groups, but it also provides a means of continuous impact monitoring as many of the statements in the ESS column demonstrate behaviour change and agency by the groups (strong indicators of empowerment; outcomes (Earl, 2001) rather than outputs). Furthermore, since all the indicators are derived directly from the PGR and transformation and benefits anticipated have been drawn from group members' own perspectives, most of which have been demonstrated by older groups as being realisable, this is truly a member-driven monitoring and evaluation approach.

6 Using the Empowerment Monitoring Tool

The 132 indicators have different uses; some are particularly important for the group, some are valorised by programmes supporting the groups, others are for staff performance and others for external reports, reporting progress and impact. The following table provides some examples of how different stakeholders have a different interest in the indicators.

Table 6 Examples of how different stakeholders are interested in different aspects

USER	INTERESTED IN	EXAMPLES OF THE TYPE OF INDICATOR EMPHASISED
Group	Its own agency	'Group voluntarily participates in rallies, marches and other forms of protest/campaign'. Series of indicators referring to its own agency, e.g. group (checks UP budget, demands entitlements, acquires land,[15] etc.) without the assistance of field staff.
Movement field staff	Their performance	'All groups know what to expect from staff and what not to'. As above, a number of indicators imply independence of the group and its ability to get things done without the assistance of field staff.
Programme staff	Programme performance	e.g. the political education programme would be interested in 'Movement representative is elected to UP' and 'Group participates in face to face meetings with UP'.

15 There are many indicators that refer to groups exercising their own agency. The importance of agency came through very strongly from the original more than 8,000 statements of benefits and so many of the derived indicators include the idea of agency.

External donors	Process	Political engagement, e.g. 'All members vote in village, union and national elections'. 'Groups makes regular contact with ward members'.
	Impact	'Evidence that village committees have taken decisions in favour of the poor as a result of the group's influence'. 'All group members are receiving their education entitlements in full and without bribes'.

ANALYSIS AT GROUP LEVEL

As indicated above, the groups use the annual reflection tool to prioritise action for the following year. They re-visit the indicators where they have 'unhappy faces', decide how much of a priority it is to them and then define a course of action to address the deficiency. This usually involves further analyses of what they felt 'unhappy' about and what factors are preventing them from making a change. They also review the relationships they have with Movement staff, other groups, and other community level entities and define what changes they would like to see in this regard. The annual plans thus developed become a road map for their own action, and also for making demands of the field staff, service providers and community power structures. The reflection process has thus contributed to empowering the group to make demands.

ANALYSIS AT PROGRAMME LEVEL

Because the groups have reviewed the same set of indicators and recorded their results carefully, it is acceptable to both aggregate and process the data using standard statistical tools.

In 2006, the programme gathered data from 6854 groups. The 'happy' and 'unhappy' faces were translated into scores according to the weighting described in chapter 5. These were fed into simple Excel-based computer programmes which allowed a range of analy-
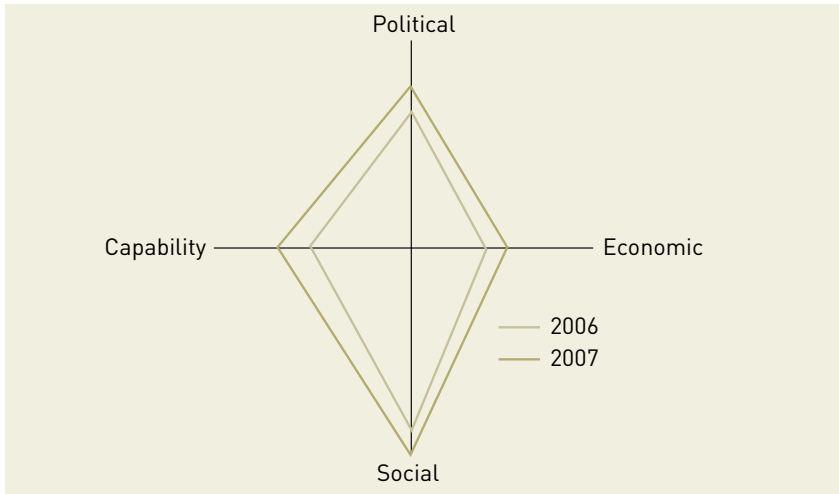
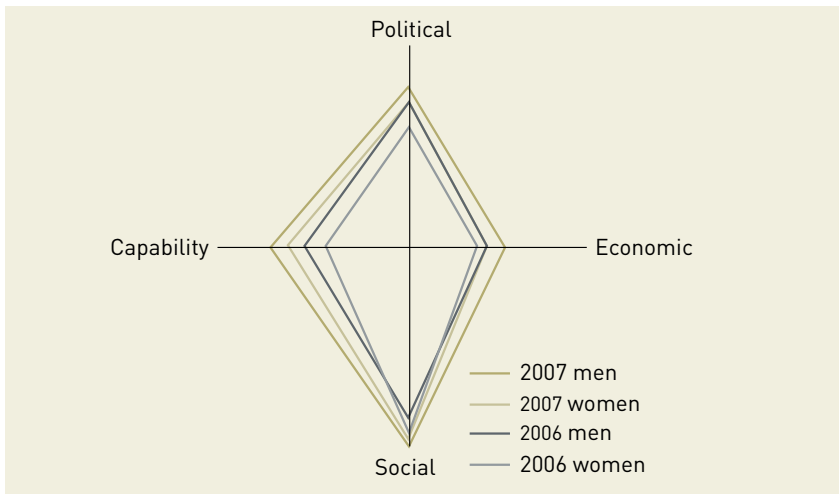**Figure 8. Comparison of average indicators for 2006 and 2007**

Figure 9. Comparisons of indices for men's and women's groups 2006/7

ses[16]. The most straightforward were reviewed in terms of the overall GDI, the individual categories of DI (political, social, capability and economic), levels of achievement (awareness, confidence and capability, and effectiveness and self-sustainability). Qualitative information was thus easily converted into quantitative data.

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16 There had been an intention to build a dedicated programme for managing the data but, in the end, it was decided that it was as easy to create spreadsheets and then aggregate data as required for analysis. This meant that no resources were needed to build special software and no additional training was required for computer operators as standard programmes were used.

The radar chart above is an example of the graphics generated to compare the indices over consecutive years. The scales have been normalised providing data which is easy to interpret – and in this case shows the average improvements in all four indices over the year.

A number of analyses can be performed on this data to investigate different variables. The following provides some examples to illustrate how the programme used the information generated by the Movement groups for their own purposes without distorting the main purpose, which was to serve the needs of the Members.

1. Gender: The indices can be disaggregated by gender. For example, in 2006 (See figure 9), the men's groups scored slightly better on three of the four indices than the women's groups, but the women's groups scored higher in terms of social empowerment.

Box 3. Index scores for men´s and women´s groups

index	Index score for men's groups	Index score for women's groups	variation
political	20.05	17.56	– 2.49
capability	7.36	6.42	– 0.94
economic	6.05	4.92	–1.13
social	20.57	21.18	0.61
combined			– 3.96

Individual indicators within each index were scrutinised by departments of the supporting organisation to search for trends, correlations and weaknesses. For example, within the political field, it was found that the members' understanding of their political rights and knowledge of political structures was high. Indicators of political engagement were also high, e.g. 99 percent of members voted in local and national elections, 93 percent indicated that they interact regularly with their elected ward[17] member, 90 percent knew where to raise complaints about rights abuses and 81 percent actively followed up on these. Movement members had been nominated for local elections in 63 percent of the groups (47 percent groups had their own member elected), group members from 82 percent of the groups were actively

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17 Each Union comprises nine wards or sub-divisions. Ward members are elected to the Union Parishad by the ward constituents. There are also three appointed women UP members, each responsible for three wards.

participating as invited members of local courts, and members from 68 percent of the groups were active on village committees. Importantly, 72 percent of the groups provided evidence that village committees had taken decisions in favour of the poor as a result of the groups' influence.

However, the programme identified some weak areas. Despite education on local government budgeting and brokering face-to-face meetings between the groups and the local government concerning annual budgets, only 13 percent of the groups in fact checked actual council expenditure against plans and 22 percent checked whether local government allocations for the poor were complied with. Knowledge of current social welfare entitlements was unexpectedly low and the active pursuit of these entitlements was also low. The knowledge of where to get technical support (agricultural extension, marketing, construction etc), accessing these services and demanding accountability were all very low. These revelations resulted in the programme setting up local resource information banks and bolstering their local government budget support programme.

The second radar chart (Figure 9) is an example of the kind of graphics generated to show the development of the groups over time by gender.

Progress has been made in all the indices but women's groups achieved a greater percentage improvement than men in terms of political empowerment, reaching parity with the men's group scores of 2006. Men's groups, however, made better progress in terms of capacity building. The differential between the GDI for men and women decreased significantly (from 19 index points to 4), which from a programme point of view was attributed to greater emphasis on support to women's groups and the annual reflection process which helped women's groups to identify targets.

The data can also be analysed at individual indicator level. Comparison of the individual indicator scores between 2006 and 2007 showed that although there had been incremental improvements on all the indicators there had been significant increases in:
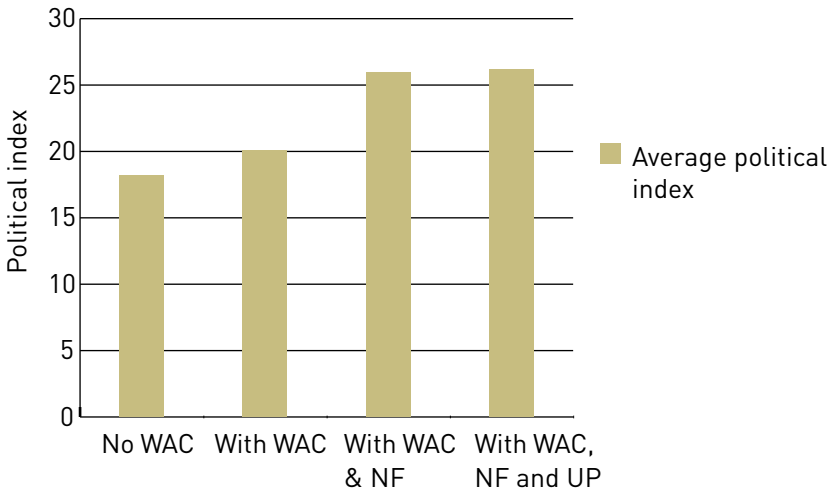
- The understanding of the importance of a people's movement, its vision and organisational structure and function.
- The understanding of the structure and function of the lowest tier of local government and the importance of having direct representation on these bodies.
- Vigilance exercised by group members on ensuring that decisions made by village committees were pro-poor.

- Voluntary work to support community development and the local government (e.g. voluntary bushing and clearing of roadsides, repair of culverts).
- The way women and girls are valued in group member families and the extent to which they were regarded as exemplary role models for non-group members.
- Numbers of women in leadership positions on village committees.
- Knowledge of social policy and social entitlements.
- Knowledge of different financial services available for the poor.
- Numbers of groups with their own bank accounts and familiarity with banking procedures, importance of planning and, obviously, the use of the annual reflection process to define future plans.

The first seven of these achievements can be attributed to the work of the democracy and gender units within the Mother organisation, both of which introduced local level support in the form of Local Government Support networks and Women Action Committees (WAC) respectively to support the member groups. The other achievements are regarded as being due to more focused mentoring and handing responsibility over to group members.

2. Different interventions: The hypothesis that the introduction of local level support networks has affected the first seven of the significant changes listed above was further interrogated by review of the data aggregated by presence or absence of the support networks. The support networks comprise members from different local movement groups and provide another platform for voice and information sharing. WAC, for example comprise women representatives from several village groups and cover an entire local constituency. They received additional support from the Gender unit of the mother organisation and were able to promote women's issues, provide group mentoring and to advocate on their behalf. The network of elected women members was another initiative of the mother organisation designed to provide a support network for group members who had managed to get elected to local government bodies. The chart (Figure 10) shows the relationship between average political indices and different mixes of interventions; with no additional interventions, with additional WAC support only, with WAC and the support of a network of elected women representatives, and with WAC, network and direct support to local government bodies. From analysis of data such as this, the organisation was able to determine what kinds of intervention made a difference.

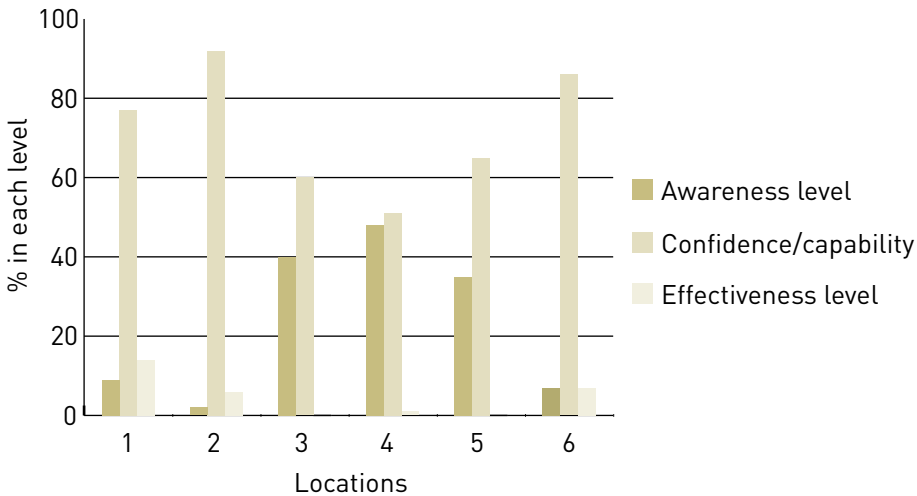**Figure 10 Political indices related to intervention type**

NF= Nari Forum (a support programme for elected women), WAC= women's action committees (village support programme), UP=programme support to the lowest tier of government

The progress of groups can also be analysed. The next chart (Figure 11) compares the percentage of groups at each level (awareness, confidence and effectiveness levels) in several different locations. The analysis of the differences in group achievements provides important insights which can be related to location context. Location 1 is an old area where the Movement has been active for more than 20 years. It has been very active and successful in securing land rights for its members. No new groups are being formed but some old groups are being re-organised which explains the small number of awareness level groups. There are surprisingly few groups scoring at the 'effectiveness' level because the Mother organisation created dependencies in the early days although it is trying to redress this now. Locations 2 and 6 also present a high proportion of groups scoring within the range representing 'confidence and capability' with a few scoring 'effectiveness'. The Movement has only been active in these locations for seven years compared to 20 years in location 1.

The rapid progression of groups in locations 2 and 6 is attributed to the intensive involvement of leftist parties rather than the Movement per se. In location 2, there is a large amount of khas land to contest and secure. The successful recovery of some of this by the

Movement has built the confidence and experience of these groups. In comparison, in location 3, where work started at the same time as location 2, there is little available khas resources and less leftist party activity. Location 6 is largely urban and so khas resources are scarce, but these groups have been active in securing other rights. Location 4 is a char (island) area and progress is slower due to its remoteness. Also, extremist parties have infiltrated the Movement in this area, resulting in a need to reform and reorganise groups. Location 5 is a new area where new groups are being formed; most are only 1–3 years old.
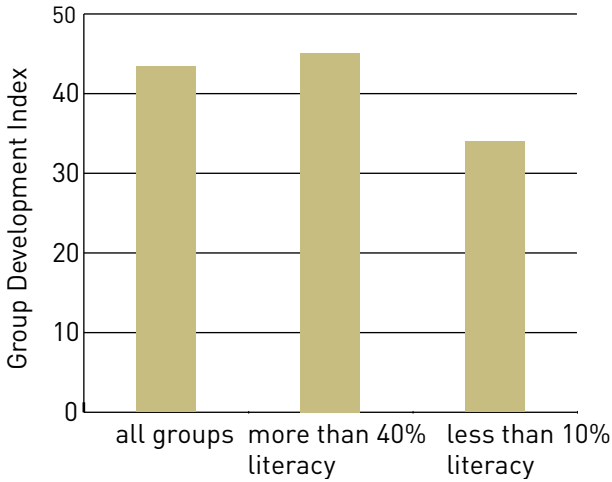
Figure 11. Different group levels by location

3. Literacy: It was hypothesised that some differences in GDI between groups might be related to the level of literacy in the group. A correlation does seem to be apparent with those groups with higher numbers of literate members performing better. In this example all the groups were between 1½ and 2½ years old.
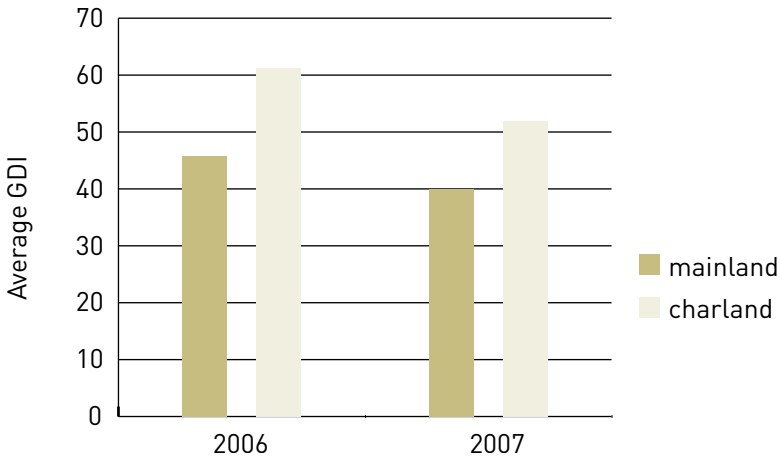
This analysis re-ignited the idea to encourage peer literacy support.

Figure 12. Literacy and group level

4. Location: Useful comparisons could be drawn between groups supported by the same area office and of the same age, but which were located on the mainland or on remote charland (riverine islands). The bar chart (Figure 13) is an example of such a comparison which shows less achievement in consecutive years of groups in the more remote area.

Figure 13. Comparison of group levels by location

5. Outliers: Extraordinary achievements/under achievements in GDI or individual indicators can be picked up easily and investigated. For example, exceptional progress was made in one area in terms of economic development and yet no khas resources had been acquired.

Further enquiries revealed that in the 'area of exceptional progress', a group had decided to collectively manage a poultry business. The success of this collective enterprise was soon adopted by other neighbouring groups. This change was initiated and driven by the groups themselves.

In another area, rather good scores were obtained on all the indicators related to getting services without bribes. This, it turned out, arose from a number of successful collective confrontations with bribe-takers (group members had complained vociferously about the withholding of part of the school stipend awards to poor students confronted the local college administration about their practice of charging different entry fees and complained about the outpatients' fees charged by the local government hospital). The rumours of their success soon spread and emboldened others to make similar demands.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Before the introduction of the community-led monitoring system, staff performance was monitored through more than fifteen different formats. The indicators were all input-related (e.g. attendance at meetings, provision of training, organising meetings between groups and local government, organising rallies). Clearly, most of these were counter to the idea that the groups would become increasingly independent of the Mother organisation and its staff. With growing independence and empowerment, staff did not need to meet with them, did not need to facilitate meetings, provide training, broker relations with service providers and did not need to keep reports on their behalf. The 'old' system provided no positive measure of the staff's increasing redundancy. In contrast, the community-led monitoring system highlights the desire of the groups to manage by themselves and scores this capability positively. Since they conduct the evaluation themselves there is no need to be deferential to their 'teacher/mentor'. Bangladeshi culture reveres the role of teacher and, generally, people tend to confirm a continuing need for them. Thus, there is a reluctance to criticise or imply that this person is no longer needed. However, the community-led monitoring system enabled group members to do this and encouraged them to see independence as a positive development. The groups thus define the areas in which they need help and those where they see they can manage themselves. A field staff member is now assessed as doing a good job if the

GDI and other indices of his groups continue to rise concomitantly with a decrease in his/her involvement with the group. [18]

A review of the individual indicators in 2006 showed that groups felt there was continued reliance on programme staff - many of the indicators were scored in such a way as to suggest that the group did not feel able to exert its own agency in, for example, access to current information, forming new groups, facilitating group discussion, keeping records, managing the process of land acquisition, etc. Overall this implied that the field level staff needed to focus on developing the independence of the groups. By the following year, groups felt much more able to manage these and scored higher in terms of capability, while many of the older groups even suggested that they could now form new groups or help existing groups.
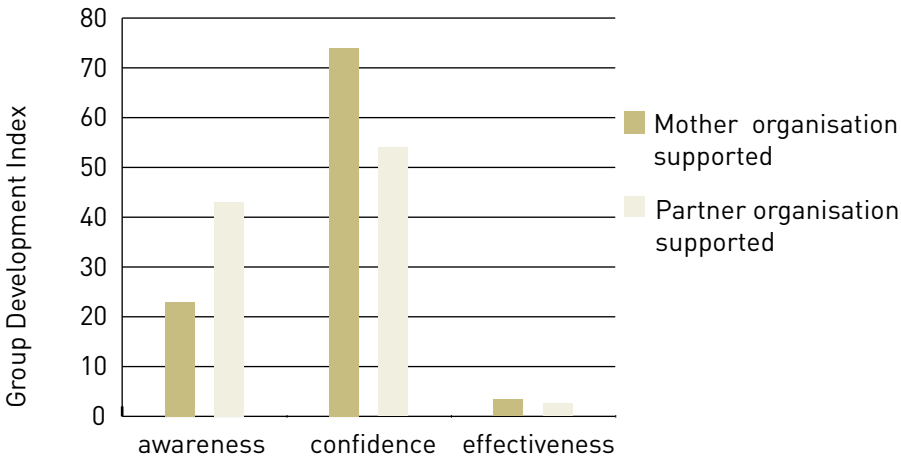
At a micro-level, the performance of individual staff could be assessed. Those groups mentored by particular field staff can be selected and compared in terms of progress and particular indices. Thus, some staff appear to be better able to promote political empowerment than others, some less able at building the capacity of the groups than others. Any adjustments to the way they work are evaluated only through improvements seen in the scoring of subsequent reflection processes – a process which is conducted independently of the staff and over which he/she has no influence.

COMPARING MODELS OF SCALING UP

As with many programmes, the Movement has been encouraged by donors and partner organisations to scale up and reach a wider geographic coverage and achieve a greater impact in terms of numbers. This involves contracting other organisations, mostly local NGOs to roll out the Mother organisation´s model of empowerment which entails training, supervision and monitoring by the Mother organisation. The community-led monitoring and evaluation tool has thus been introduced to these partner organisations to use with their groups.

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18 Occasionally, groups have 'raised the bar' and have reversed previous year's 'happy faces' as they demanded greater evidence of achievement. These cases of lower scores need to be examined on a case-by-case basis so that staff performance is not assessed unfavourably.

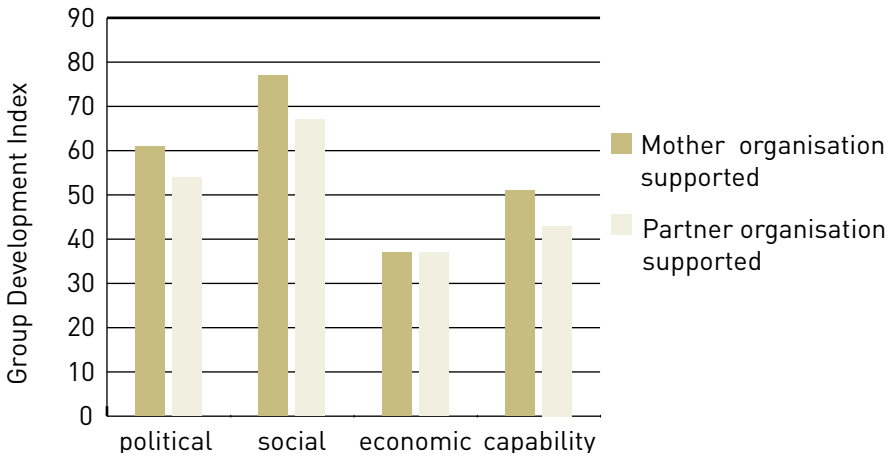**Figure 14. Comparison of mother- and partner-supported groups**

The first chart (figure 14) compares levels of empowerment of groups supported by the Mother organisation compared to those of a similar age supported by Partner organisations. It seems that progress is faster when the group is supported by the Mother organisation. The second chart (figure 15) shows the same comparison by individual indices. The social, political and capability indices are all higher for groups supported by the Mother organisation. However, there is no difference in economic empowerment between Mother-supported or Partner-supported groups.

Comparisons of the data thus suggest that the Mother organisation supports empowerment better than the Partners. With the exception of economic indicators, individual indicator scores are generally two to eight percent higher than those for the Partner groups although the overall trends are very similar.

Analysis at the individual indicators reveal a few stark contrasts to this norm.

Understandably, the indicators relating to feelings of membership of the Movement and closeness to the ideology of the Movement are much higher among the Mother organisation supported groups compared with the partner supported groups.

Figure 15. Further comparison of mother- and partner-supported groups

However, the partner-supported groups scored higher in terms of regular attendance at meetings and making regular savings as well as recording minutes of meetings. They also score higher in terms of being able to organise themselves for weekly meetings without external help. All of these indicators are self-defined indicators of capacity. The programme attributes these higher scores to the fact that most of the partner groups were existing micro-credit groups which are required to meet weekly according to externally-imposed rules.

On the other hand, the partner-supported groups scored much lower (more than 16 percent lower) than Mother organisation supported groups on feeling able to explain why their direct representation in local government is important. They were also less willing to act together to confront injustice, much more likely to pay bribes for health and education entitlements and have significantly less knowledge of village committees, their role and have less contact with them.

It seems that the motivation for meeting in the partner groups is primarily to get access to micro-credit and that although political and social empowerment is emphasised through group discussions, the impact is diluted. They know about their rights but are less interested or able to act. The Mother organisation has no micro-credit provision, savings are made by the group themselves and internally distributed as loans. Interestingly, the satisfaction with loan distribution is much higher in these groups than in the partner micro-credit groups. The Mother organisation group scores exceed the partner groups in all categories except those related to organisation required for savings and

credit. Furthermore, partner groups have very little knowledge of alternative financial services compared with the Mother organisation groups which can identify different services and exercise choice in availing these. [19]

Another area of stark difference is the interpretation of women's rights. The partner groups score much lower on the way they translate their understanding of women's rights into everyday action and also score less on *'the way women and girls are valued in the family of group members and are regarded as a role model by non-group members'*.

These differences question the efficacy of the approach to adding on rights education to service delivery programmes. The Mother organisation groups appear to gain more in terms of social and political empowerment. The data seems to suggest that this is due to the solidarity which imbues the Movement and resultant willingness to contest rights, act collectively (e.g. to resist bribe-giving) and engage with local governance bodies. Partner groups are more removed from the Movement and their raison d'être is primarily access to a service (micro-credit) rather than coalescing around a common felt injustice.

ANALYSIS TO SATISFY DONOR REQUIREMENTS

Wainwright (2003) notes on writing about the challenges of measuring the impact in the voluntary sector that the *'danger is that funders become primarily concerned with the final, hard outcomes and will see anything short of this as failure'*. With the Millennium Declaration, donors have become fixated with justifying investment in terms of proving a contribution to the Millennium Development Goals. It thus has become harder to defend programmes with empowerment as an end in itself. The inability of the Movement to be able to prove its contribution became a stickier and stickier issue and led one donor to comment, *'We know in our hearts they are doing good work but not in our heads'*.

The overriding goal of the Millennium Declaration is to end poverty and hunger. In this context poverty refers to income poverty and the target is to *'reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than*

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19 Interestingly, through conversations with Mother organisation group members, we learned that they mostly avoid micro-credit, preferring their own rotating saving and credit scheme or no credit at all. 'It costs too much', 'It is too stressful'.

a dollar a day'. This monitoring tool does not directly provide information of this nature. However, in order to score a 'happy face' on *'the group is productively utilising khas resources'*, they must all share and endorse the evidence to support this. The evidence is recorded separately as metric tons of produce or profit accruing. In addition, the external impact assessment commissioned by the donors in 2007 used cost and returns survey data to calculate an average return on investment figure per acre of khas resource. This amount of additional profit (over and above selling labour, which was practiced before acquiring the land) from agricultural production is used as a proxy for increased income. We can compare this figure to the self-calculated profits noted by groups which have benefited from khas resources to make any adjustments to the universe of khas resource users. Using this approach, the Movement noted in 2005 that rights to more than 20,000 acres of khas resources were granted to nearly 40,000 landless families. Based on calculations of average profits, each family can be regarded as increasing their annual income by about US$ 440. In addition to the use of khas resources, the groups have instigated their own rotating savings and credit schemes and on average are estimated to earn just over US $ 1,000 from these and selling their day labour, making a total income of US $ 1,440 (or sufficient to support four people at the rate of a dollar per day) compared to about US$ 300 from selling labour alone.

As mentioned before, most groups have yet to get access to khas resources and still regard membership of the Movement as having economic as well as political and social value. The self-run rotating savings and credit schemes are one reason but some groups have also initiated collective economic enterprises. Other economic advantages include access to entitlements without bribes. Vulnerable groups are entitled to 30 kg of wheat, the poorest 40 percent of primary school children are entitled to stipends, and health and veterinary care are subsidised for the poor. Bribes are not supposed to be taken by officials for land documents, entrance into schools, securing a bed in a hospital, or opening a bank account. Where these are taken and entitlements distributed according to party political affiliations, the economic ramifications for the poor are huge. The 2007 external impact assessment using conventional survey methods found that Movement members, who were entitled, gain much better access to Government safety net programmes than non-members. Some 29–63 percent of Movement members entitled to Vulnerable Group Development cards and pensions receive them, compared with only

one to eight percent of non-members (control group). In the case of education stipends, 92 percent of Movement members' children, who are entitled to stipends, are given them compared to only 46 percent of non-members. This corroborates with the self-assessed data generated by the community-led monitoring process.

Another MDG target under the goal of 'gender equality' is to *'eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education'*. The reflection process has a number of indicators concerning gender equality; one example is *'the position of women and girls in the family is valued'*. To score a 'happy face' all group members have to cite a range of evidence to support this. Sending girls to school is commonly put forward as one form of evidence. Where all group members can say they are doing this, a supplementary box is ticked. There are also indicators which describe knowledge and access to education entitlements. There is an inherent checking mechanism for this kind of information as other groups' members know if anyone is not actually ensuring that both boys and girls go to school regularly, which suggests that the validity of this information is likely to be high. Furthermore, this is not registration at school but regular school attendance as defined by group members as an aspect of 'valuing the girl child'. Thus, the Movement's Annual Report to donors in 2005 (after a year of the introduction of the group reflection process) was able to report that 145,207 families send their boys and girls to school regularly and children from over 88 percent of groups at confidence and effectiveness levels are regularly attending school, purely from information generated by the Group Reflection process.

This Social Movement may have come to life fighting for access to khas resources with obvious economic consequences for those who secured the rights to productively utilize these resources, but a whole range of well-being achievements have been realised, which are less easily linked to the income poverty goal. Donors needed to be reminded of the range of benefits movement members were availing but for which there was little more than anecdotal evidence, or worse, presumption on the part of the Mother organisation.

The Annual reports submitted to donors have thus changed significantly since the introduction of the Group Reflection process first was, introduced in 2004. Earlier reports concentrated on 'products', for example the number of trainings provided and supplemented with unsubstantiated commentary, e.g. *'by awareness trainings the group members have been made aware about their rights, existing social system, social discrimination and exploitation and repression by influential (people) and have*

learnt to confront it. As a result they have become united and active against all forms of exploitation and oppression' (ex Annual Report, 2002) and *'five dialogue sessions have been arranged to facilitate people to ask different questions to the members and chairmen (of local government).... As a result of it, the works of the Union Parishad (lowest elected tier of local government) have got more pace and accountability and transparency'* (from the Annual Report, 2002). A few case studies illustrated personal success stories, but they carried little weight in terms of convincing donors of a good return on their investment.

By comparison, the 2006 Annual report was able to state, for example, *that more than 79 percent, 69 percent and 48 percent of the groups were able to access their full entitlements to education, health and social welfare programmes respectively and without the payment of any bribes, and that more than 80 percent of the groups meet regularly with the local government body and that 30 percent independently checked that it properly utilised funds allocated for the poor.* Also, through representation by over 3,500 group members on various village committees, more than 76 percent of the groups at 'confidence level' could provide evidence that pro-poor decisions had been made by these committees, that non-group members actively seek out their opinions (78 percent consult awareness level groups, 92 percent confidence groups and 98 percent effectiveness groups) while respect was felt to be afforded to group members by the local elite (a 44 percent awareness level, 77 percent confidence level and 97 percent effectiveness level). The Group Reflection process enabled the collection of outcome data that previously been gathered through resource intensive research studies. Furthermore, this outcome data has been quantified. For the first time, donors were getting answers to their question about the impact of the programme of empowerment; *'empowered to do what?'*

COSTS

The examples given are illustrative of the many kinds of analyses the Mother organisation could usefully make using the data generated by the Movement members for their own use. As well as gender, age of group, location, a range of socio-cultural variables could be analysed for correlations which might affect the empowerment process.

With a very small research and analysis unit, the organisation which supports the Movement has been able to use the data generated by the Movement groups themselves for a range of assessments of the programme's strategy and for performance management.

Field staff have thus been released from the burden of monitoring and evaluation and freed up to spend quality time supporting the growth of the groups rather than filling in forms and writing monitoring reports.[20] No costly and resource-intensive baseline and follow-up studies have been undertaken.

An annual reflection session costs the organisation less than US $5. This figure includes apportioned costs for training of facilitators, transport and honorarium for facilitators and quality assurance checks. The data collection and computer entry is done by five data entry clerks all year round and represents only a small outlay of the total costs.

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20 In comparison, field staff at a large INGO in Bangladesh with which the principle author worked for many years conducted their own time-use analyses and found that more than 60 percent of their time was used for reporting and monitoring.

7 Facing the Challenges

In Chapter 2 we discussed the challenges to measuring empowerment. This section looks at the extent to which this monitoring and evaluation approach has addressed these challenges.

The tool relies entirely on the Movement members' own interpretation of empowerment. As well as incorporating statements of actual empowerment, it also enables the members to identify what they see as empowerment targets by envisioning the future. The emphasis on the members' own definition of empowerment displaces external bias and expectation.

The group reflection process recognises that empowerment is a process, and that what is regarded as an 'acceptable state of empowerment' both within the group and by external observers will change. This tool requires groups to provide a wide range of evidence to support the scoring of a 'happy face'. This evidence is clearly context-specific and, as long as the group feels that it is sufficient, they will score a 'happy face'. The external facilitator makes sure that groups are not complacent and encourages self-criticism so that the evidence provided is substantive rather than glib. Rather than relying on a universal set of questions derived from participatory research (the approach used by Hashemi and Schuler (1993), Krishna (2005) among others), a whole range of explanations can be given as evidence of achievement of, for example, 'valuing women and girls in the household'[21]. This means that they tend to become more exacting each time they conduct an evaluation, i.e. they tend to become harder on themselves (moving the goal posts). There is, after all, no benefit or incentive to over-estimate achievement. Thus, the target can change and, indeed, some groups even reversed previously scored 'happy faces' in subsequent years when they felt that a greater weight of evidence was needed to convince them as a group that group member families were indeed valuing girls and women. Whilst this may thus dampen the speed at which groups progress from one level to another, it in effect entails positive changes in

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21 The 2007 External Impact Assessment found that this included involving women in decisions regarding children's education, marriage, cultivation and use of land, household purchases, lease of land and water bodies, investment in land and business.

scores and transition from one level to another over the years that are increasingly conservative in terms of achievement. The groups have incorporated their own 'moving target.'

ATTEMPTS TO MEASURE EMPOWERMENT LACK RIGOUR

Note: The following has been written by Carlos Barahona, Senior Statistician[22] following an in-depth critique of the approach.

To assess the extent to which this monitoring and evaluation approach addressed the challenge of adequately meeting the demands of rigour, it would be useful to go back to the four points made under this title at the end of Chapter 2. Here it was stated that rigour derives from the process of conceptualisation of the measurement, the design of the measuring method, the reliability and validity of the information and finally, the analysis of the measurements.

1. Conceptualisation
The Movement adopted an approach for developing indicators of empowerment that was consultative, systematic, allowed tracking of meaningful changes and provided a good indication of the diversity found within the population of groups. In the first stage, the consultation process (participatory grassroots review) resulted unsurprisingly in 8,000 statements which then were synthesised into statements that had the potential to become indicators. Perhaps as important, these indicators were structured according to factors and categories that made them useful for measuring specific aspects of 'empowerment' that the Movement is interested in tracking for decision-making at different levels. The final 132 indicators generated were then suitable for constructing the ACCESS index which provides the possibility of synthesis across indicators. This resulting set of indicators reflects concepts and definitions that have proven useful to each group and to the Movement. The degree to which external agents may agree with them is likely to be variable and anyone with a real interest in using these measurements should seriously engage with the primary users to gain enough understanding to base the decision to use, criticise or suggest changes. In doing so, external agents need to remain aware of the raison d'être of the system that is

22 At the Statistical Services Centre, University of Reading, UK.

in place, and that while improvements can be suggested to any measuring system, the onus of flexibility should remain with the external agent.

2. Measuring method

The set of indicators generated has a main requirement; to provide the groups with the opportunity to discuss and analyse the progress that each group is making towards reaching the aspirations of its members. This set of indicators however has a second use, mainly for the benefit of the Movement as an organisation that would like to track the progress of the groups. A third use has appeared through the demand for information from agents external to the Movement, such as funding agencies. This means that the type of information that it generates has to be appropriate for each of those uses.

At group level, the information needs to be rich, to allow for discussions of aspects that are not easy – or impossible – to quantify, and susceptible for transformation into a scale that can be used for comparisons over time and across groups. The adoption of a binary scale to assess each indicator provides an elegant solution to this big challenge. It is simple to explain to the users and simple to use. At group level it gives the incentive to engage in the discussions about the current state of the indicator, the barriers to progress, the way forward to achieve the group aspirations, while at the same time focusing the analysis towards a simple final measurement that has only two possible outcomes: happy/not happy. At Movement level, it provides data that is simple to collect, easy to check for quality and with plenty of potential for aggregated analysis through standard statistical methods.

An important advantage of the method of measurement adopted is that it offers the opportunity to have a good level of uniformity in the way that each group applies it when the assessment of the indicators is made. The nature and number of groups require a method for measuring indicators that can be applied by each group with the minimum amount of intervention from the paid staff of the movement. Finally, the method devised is also transparent, documented and susceptible to the scrutiny of parties with whom individual groups or the Movement as a whole may be willing to share the information.

3. Reliability and validity

With respect to the internal validity of the indicators, which in the scientific context refers to the fact that inferences about causal rela-

tionships between two measurements can be properly demonstrated, it is the use that the groups and Movement have made of the information generated that demonstrate the validity of the measurements. The members of the groups have found that the assessments well describe the situation they are involved in and allow them to plan and take actions that result in an improvement of their reality.

The external validity of the measurements, that associated with the potential to make inferences (generalisations) about all the groups, needs to be looked at carefully. So far, a subset of up to 5,500 groups (22.4 percent) has contributed to the data that is being used for inferential purposes. Such a sample should be large enough to give a good snapshot of the whole population. However, the way in which the sample has been selected opens the door to criticism from sceptical observers, as there is no objective way to ensure that the subset has not been selected in an unbiased manner. The Movement can well argue that the subset has been constructed in a way that minimises biases of inclusion/exclusion and that any group would have had the opportunity to be included.

However this is difficult to demonstrate unless the sampling process has been designed to achieve a sample with such characteristics. While the criticisms are not the same as a demonstration of lack of external validity, there is a need to reassure users about the existence of external validity. There are three solutions to this situation:

- The subset is assumed to be good enough to be reliable.
- The subset is assessed, a posterior, to determine whether specific biases have been introduced or not. This would add to the case for external validity of the data already collected.
- A sampling process is devised for future data collections to start building a body of information that has built in the insurance for external validity provided by conventional statistical sampling methods[23].

The reliability of the measures, that is their consistency over repeated measures, is very much associated with the group that uses the measurements. The fact that the indicators are being used to set goals for the groups and that those are assessed by the group on a yearly basis helps with this characteristic of the measures. There will

23 This has been the option adopted by the Movement, which at the time of the authors' most recent interaction with them, was being developed.

be challenges in the future about how much historical data can be used to reflect trends in specific indicators as the aspirations of the groups change with their development. Perhaps the Movement should consider, the extent to which they expect to be able to use these measurements for such a purpose.

4. Data analysis
Through the conceptualisation and design of the method for measuring the indicators, the Movement tackled two key challenges to make the data generated through a participatory approach suitable for the use of conventional statistical tools for data analysis. They imposed an acceptable level of standardisation and a substantial amount of structure into the conceptualisation of their measurement of empowerment, two of the conditions for the integration of participatory approaches and statistical methods described by Barahona and Levy (2003).

As proven by the use that several stakeholders have been making of the data, the resulting 'data sets' can be subjected to standard statistical analysis. If the Movement were to compile a census of groups, there would be no question about external reliability, and the data would be totally suitable for any type of statistical analysis. If the data are based on a sample, there are some considerations that would make the inferences more robust as discussed under external validity.

OTHER REASONS PEOPLE WERE NOT HAPPY WITH THE REFLECTION PROCESS

The introduction of this monitoring tool was far from easy and it met with resistance everywhere, except with the Members.

Donors
Donors were very sceptical and did not trust something that was essentially self-assessed. A consultant's report in 2005 noted *'the Reflection and Monitoring and Evaluation system developed is innovative. This means the Movement has to continually 'sell' the approach to external agencies'.* Whilst this is important for the Movement, as it forces them to be self-critical and ultimately strengthens their arguments for innovation, it is nevertheless time-consuming and, even at times demoralising, to be on the receiving end of criticisms based on experience with conventional and traditional Monitoring and Evaluation approaches. Donors were, on the whole, not comfortable with stepping out of their comfort zone with its reverence for external, survey- driven

evaluation, were not familiar with the developments in rights-based work and attempts to measure social outcomes and found working with a Movement difficult. This resulted in a general lack of support and interest in the Movement's work to develop the system. These concerns are discussed below.

1. Mistrust of self assessment

External perceptions included a mistrust of the subjective nature of the assessment. Furthermore, there were growing concerns about the validity of the process as typified by the 2005 mid-term review, which noted that *'results reported are for 5,500 groups. They may not be a representative sample of the total (24,499 groups,) and (the team) has not been able to test the validity of the process and accuracy of the data'.*

There are, in fact, several advantages in terms of validity of data collected in this way. Firstly, *'because each group uses the information for its own purposes the incentives for providing distorted information are reduced to a minimum and the quality of any resulting data set is likely to be much better than that of information collected through traditional methods such as surveys'* (Barahona, 2008).

Carlos Barahona responds directly to this concern as follows:

Self-assessment will always be regarded as potentially biased. This is particularly true when the result of the assessment is linked to incentives such as allocation of resources or payment.[24] In the case of the monitoring and evaluation approach developed by this Movement, the assessment needs to be done by the groups themselves for their own benefit. The reason for the assessment is a self-evaluation of current state and aspirations of the group that will allow them to plan and act. Removing the self-assessment element would remove the soul of the process that is regarded as the most important element of the evaluation. The critical assessment that each group makes at each meeting gives a good deal of reassurance about the objectivity of the process, and the Movement has made an effort to make these processes transparent and well-documented for the benefit of the Movement and other external agents. This contributes towards convincing sceptical partners about the level of trust that can be given to the data. However, the Movement should be aware that this process of reassuring will need to be continuous and well-documented. External agents need to understand the process that the Movement has developed, and to assess, from their own perspective, whether it offers the assurances they seek. It is likely that after all the informa-

24 There are no such external incentives within the Movement.

tion has been carefully examined, these external agents will go away, not just reassured, but very impressed with what the Movement has achieved.

2. Perception that it was too detailed and time-consuming

The 2006 donor commissioned external review of the programme noted *'the recent development of the 'reflection process' does allow critical result monitoring'*, but went on to add *'However, despite the general usefulness, the method appears to be overly detailed... It contains 132 indicators for each group. Whilst it is understood that the method represents an important group capacity-building tool, in order for it to be a realistic monitoring tool it needs to be streamlined to reduce the number of indicators and the time taken to complete'.*

Participants in a donor-consortium field trip to observe a group reflection process in action in 2007 dismissed the approach, *'How can poor people engage in a process which takes three hours or more... they have mouths to feed. This is an imposition on their time. Either that or this is not the target group we thought we were supporting!'*

We took these observations back to several Member groups. They were flabbergasted; *'We do this because it is important to us', 'yes, it takes a long time but is time well spent', 'how could we review everything we do with only a few statements to describe it?' 'These people do not understand - we never talked about these things properly before - it has opened our eyes'.*

The views of the donors were influenced by the concerns around using people's valuable time through externally-commissioned questionnaire surveys, focus group discussions, interviews with largely external benefits. However, in this form of monitoring, the group members gave only the time they considered beneficial to them with no concern about external demands. There was no requirement except their own to complete analyses (which sometimes they did in two sessions rather than one).

Donors wanted the Movement to conduct the reflection process with only a sample of groups. Carlos Barahona responds to the question *'To sample or not to sample?'* as follows:

The method has been challenged by external observers from the point of view of not using a sample to collect the information. While the non-adoption of a sampling approach may have some implications for the use of the information at Movement level, it should be evident to the observer that the main objective of measuring these indicators is for the use and benefit of each group level. This means that each group needs to engage in the process of assessment and that selection of a subset of groups makes no sense. On this basis the Movement needs to make the decision about the number of groups from whom it

wants to collect the results of the assessment of indicators, and how. The advantages of 100 percent coverage is that the analysis of these data would yield results that are free of sampling errors and therefore, assuming that the non-sampling errors are minimised throughout the process, the Movement has access to the best possible information. If the compilation of group assessments can be seen as a by-product of the operations of the groups and their interaction with the Movement, there is no real argument for a sample-based approach. This needs to be put in the context of the resources required. In practice, a full census has not been achieved so far and this may be taken as proof that a designed sample may be more appropriate. This is something that is relatively simple to devise, and after having achieved so much with the overall process, the Movement could give some consideration to the idea of a sample based approach[25].

3. Setting up and running the process is costly

The scale of the monitoring (all groups everywhere) sent alarm bells ringing for the funders. However, considering monitoring and evaluation budgets are often five to ten percent of programme costs, this process provided excellent value-for-money, costing less than two percent and arguably doing more than providing monitoring data as it also provided a focus for groups to reflect on progress and make action plans, which seem to have hastened the process of empowerment.

The initial participatory grass roots review was relatively costly in this case, but this was partly because there was an open-ended challenge to face. We did not know where this review was going to lead. If an organisation wanted to replicate this process, the initial costs to conduct a listening survey of people's perceptions about empowerment would not have to be costly.

The Movement wanted every group to be able to go through the process every year, which meant that a very large number of facilitators were required.[26] However, it was decided that these should be group members who would provide this service to other groups (not their own) to ensure that staff were not involved, that relative neutrality was preserved and that they understood the perspectives of the group so could help them most appropriately. The training of the first

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25 See footnote 20.
26 Each facilitator was given about 20 groups each year, amounting to running two reflection sessions per month. The idea was to ensure that they would not get bored and routinise the process and that was not too much of a burden on people who had other priorities in their lives.

batch of facilitators was done in the pilot phase and facilitators proven to be effective went on to train others in batches. They were paid a small honorarium and out-of-pocket travel expenses for each reflection process undertaken.

Charts were developed that could be re-used from one year to the next. Snacks were organised by the groups themselves. Once again, this highlights the difference between doing something for an outsider's benefit and doing it for their own benefit.

Five data entry clerks were recruited at minimal cost. A small research unit comprising four people was put in charge of analysis, and identifying and carrying out supporting research, as well as reporting to management. They were also responsible for quality assurance, randomly checking data entry and conducting random spot checks on groups undertaking the reflection process to ensure that the process and facilitation was of good quality.

The perception that this process was costly fuelled demands for the process to be 'streamlined' and conducted only on a sample basis. This has been commented on above. Methodologically sound, sampling nevertheless defeats the point for the groups themselves. Rather than seeing this as a burden, they felt it was an important occasion to assess their progress, reflect on their situation and prioritise future action. Not one group suggested that this was burdensome. Rather, some groups suggested that it should be done on a semi-annual basis! The reflection process is part of the empowerment strategy.

4. No controls for comparison

Many donors complained that they could not make a judgement on the successes claimed by the Movement as they did not have any baseline or control data. Carlos Barahona responds to this as follows: *'I have a problem with the imposition of case-control methodology by donors as the control "sites" are in most cases not good controls. In this case in particular, I doubt if the nature of the Movement and its work allows to artificially create a "without" scenario that can be assessed in the same way as the evaluation that is carried out by the groups. The groups need the evaluation because they are a group in the first place and you don't find the equivalent to "groups" occurring where the Movement is not working, or at least I would find it difficult to believe that without the political and organisational effort of a movement people will come together into groups that have similar objectives to those of the Movement. So, I would argue that it is not possible to construct a control for 'group'. If you want to look at other indicators, not associated with group, but with individuals or households, then the possibility of considering the use of 'control' or comparison cases is open.'*

New groups are constantly being formed. They conduct a reflection process within their first year. The results of these represent the closest approximation of the 'without' scenario as they are embryonic groups.

It has taken more than three years to convince donors that the community-led monitoring system is valid and can provide most of the information they require to track achievements. When a Sida programme staff member visited groups undertaking a reflection process, she was convinced. She saw, for herself, the enthusiasm with which each indicator was debated and heard the powerful evidence that the groups shared to defend their decisions. She came back to Dhaka enthused but could not persuade her consortium colleagues. Only after a major external impact evaluation was conducted in 2007, which corroborated the data generated through the Movement's own reflection process, was there some relaxation by the rest of the sceptics. But each time a new batch of donors (and their traditional-minded consultants) takes up office, the same process of convincing them of the efficacy of this approach has to start all over again.

THE MOTHER ORGANISATION

The Mother organisation was very unsure of the potential of the process and because they were being compared to NGOs which, they were constantly being told, have *'professionalised and expert Monitoring and Evaluation Units', 'undertake baseline and impact surveys',* and *'generate quantitative data on which we (donors) can assess our return on investment',* they became very diffident about their approach. Management did not have the understanding, experience or confidence to defend the process. They were, however, vehement and unyielding in their demand that the system must primarily be of use to members.

1. Pioneering something new
The initial pilot was delayed by a year. Although there were floods and external demands on the Mother organisation, the main reason for this delay was lack of confidence. Management was not convinced of the process and gave virtually no support or resources to the evaluation unit entrusted with running the pilot. Furthermore, donors' scepticism and preference for conventional monitoring and evaluation further undermined the management's support for the process. The process was basically marginalised.

It took the courage of one senior member of staff of the Mother organisation, supported and motivated by the external advisor, to keep the initiative alive. There was no precedent in Bangladesh for this approach and no-one to turn to for advice.

2. Staff of the Mother organisation felt judged

The process is now totally organised and driven by the groups. Some staff of the supporting Mother organisation tried to undermine the results because they directly challenged their activities. Groups were outspoken and critical of many of the organisation's activities and irregularities. Initially, there was a tendency to brush these aside and an eagerness to re-interpret or dismiss unexpected or unwanted answers (e.g. a typical response was *'They (the groups) probably did not understand the question).* Staff felt insecure and, as colleagues working for conventional NGOs were not so judged, they felt resentful. As staff did not collect the data there was less opportunity to influence or even manipulate the data. Despite the rights agenda, many field staff did not feel comfortable with being judged 'from below'.

3. The process demands flexibility

As a result of the groups' own analysis of their progress, they inevitably made demands of the Mother organisation to make good deficiencies. The planning and budgeting demands of donors were not flexible enough to allow changes in activities to accommodate these. The groups became quite frustrated on some issues and staff felt awkward that they could not respond to demands owing to these bureaucratic constraints. Rather than confronting donors with this, the organisation felt obliged to continue with the activities which had been signed off in the project proposal. For example, certain training and support had been included in the action plan that was found to be inappropriate or not effective through the refection process but still had to be seen to be done.

However, more recently the Movement was able to develop a log frame which met the needs of the donor and enabled flexibility. Because the GDI (and the component SDIs) encompass a range of different indicators, and progress can be asymmetrical, flexibility can be accommodated. In addition to the overall GDI, SDI scores and the progression of groups, the objectively verifiable indicators include quantitative indicators such as numbers of groups which report that *'village committees have taken pro-poor decisions', 'the local elite respect us', 'non-group members seek our opinion', 'we are an effective pressure*

group monitoring and influencing UP budgets and plans'. Evidence to support these achievements will be context-specific. As mentioned earlier, groups develop in their own ways depending on the context and this has been accommodated, even in a log frame!

In order to meet the aggregation needs of the external agencies, the groups review the same set of 132 indicators using a somewhat similar process of annual review. This necessarily imposes a limitation on the flexibility and interpretation of the reflection process. There is also a danger that the process becomes mechanical (assigning 'happy' and 'unhappy' faces with little critical reflection). This criticism places a burden of responsibility on the quality of facilitation to ensure that the process remains lively and relevant to the needs of the group. The evidence required for each group to satisfy itself that it can score a 'happy face' on any particular indicator is always context-specific and there is therefore plenty of scope for flexibility here.

These most recent exercises have led to a few minor modifications to the existing indicators and identification of new ones that might be important in the future.

8 Applying the Approach to Your Programme

The approach is best suited for capacity-building programmes, advocacy and social movements, rights-based programmes and governance programmes where outcomes include attitudinal and behavioural changes. These programmes may, for example be supported by governmental or non-governmental organisations, social movements or trade and workers unions.

In this chapter, we describe the steps to set up a similar evaluation approach in your programmes and projects. We deliberately try not to be prescriptive but suggest some underlying principles and present some 'things to think about' at different stages of implementation.

First and foremost, we need to restate the fact that rights-based programmes do not follow linear patterns. They are not like immunization programmes, food distribution programmes, asset transfer programmes or relief and social safety-net programmes. These deliver goods and services. People receive the goods and services. Rights-based programmes, on the other hand, need to provide an enabling environment for the realisation of rights (information, systems and structures) but cannot supply a 'rights pill'. People become interested in exercising their rights when they understand the extent to which these are denied and the impact of that denial on their daily lives. Inevitably, this will not be felt in the same way by everyone everywhere. Changes in rights holder/duty bearer relationships and unequal power relationships generally come about when the inequities and inefficiencies are challenged. These challenges will come from local circumstances, e.g. illegal occupation of land, corrupt practice of local government officials, security threats, dowry disputes, vote-rigging, workplace irregularities, local disputes, etc. This means that progress in realisation of rights will not be linear and will move at a different pace and in a different direction in different contexts. Rights-based work cannot follow a 'one size fits all' format, and as a consequence any evaluation must be able to accommodate measuring different aspects of change which progress at different rates (e.g. the realisation of political rights may progress faster than the realisation of social rights in one area but might be the reverse in another). Secondly, this change is about knowledge, values, behaviour, atti-

tudes and practice and can best be described by those experiencing the change. The changes need to be expressed in ways which are meaningful to those experiencing the change. And thirdly as the project participants will be largely managing the evaluation themselves, the evaluation process must be useful for them. So, when designing an evaluation the following principles must be taken into consideration.

PRINCIPLES

- Recognition of the non-linear nature of empowerment.

- Change (outcomes and impact) must be described by those experiencing change themselves.

- The evaluation process must accommodate local specificity and experience. The evidence supporting attainment of specific indicators may be different but the description of change embedded in any indicator is universal for the programme concerned.

This approach is not suitable for all types of programmes. It is not a participatory evaluation which can be adapted for different circumstances. Before considering incorporating the approach, the project stakeholders need to review the questions listed in the critical choice Box 1.

TIMING START-UP

In the case presented here the Social Movement had already been in existence for several years prior to receiving external funding. It was therefore possible to interact with member groups which had evolved and had some experience of change in order to generate the initial set of 8,000 statements. This is more of a challenge with 'new' projects, but in fact it is rare that a project is initiated with a clean slate. NGOs, social movements and government departments will generally approach funders with a programme that is already gestating. Either they will be proposing geographical expansion or diversification of activities. In both cases this means that former and current project participants will be able to describe change, both experienced and anticipated. It is reasonable to assume that at least a preliminary set of benefit statements can be generated in these circumstances.

CRITICAL CHOICE

Is this approach appropriate for my programme?

- **What kind of programme?** The approach is best suited to capacity-building programmes with intended outcomes relating to changes in individual and collective behaviour and relationships. It is not appropriate for direct service delivery type programmes.

- **Is the programme people-centred?** The approach only works where all stakeholders are committed to the principle that the interests and perspectives of the project participants are to be privileged.

- **Does the programme allow sufficient time for change?** Behaviour and relationship changes take time. A project with a timeline of less than three years is unlikely to see sustainable outcomes of this nature.

Ideally, a programme to gather the perspectives of former, current and prospective project participants should be carried out prior to formalisation of the project log frame or other official frameworks for the authorisation of funding so that indicators developed from these can be incorporated from the outset. In practice, this exercise may more often be conducted in the first year. But this requires greater flexibility in the project documentation which will have to accommodate indicators developed post facto.

THE PROCESS

Plan the initial statement
– gathering exercise

Things to think about:

– **Choice of approach** – the approach to gathering the first set of statements must be culturally appropriate and must unlock spontaneity and free thinking. Those involved in the exercise must feel at ease to express themselves in ways which are meaningful for them. They should not feel judged or manipulated. Where those generating the statements can control the process, the quality of statement generation will be best. For example, they can develop their own drama, facilitate their own discussions, and draw their own pictures. Outsiders merely act as recorders. Possible approaches include: PRA, group discussions, drama, picture drawing, storytelling, songs.

- **How to sample** – the first set of statements is critical as they must reflect as far as possible the diversity of experience of project participants. It will be necessary to think through the variables which might affect experience, e.g. ethnicity, geographic location, gender, age. The statement gathering exercise should cover these variables. The number of exercises should nevertheless be kept small as it is better to have an in-depth review that generates rich insightful statements than quick exercises that generate superficial generic statements.

> Pilot the initial statement
> – gathering exercise

Things to think about:
- **Introduction** – think about how the project will explain the purpose and process to those taking part in the pilot. It is a reflection exercise they should do for themselves and by themselves. They should be encouraged to think about the benefits and detriments associated with involvement in the project. It may be useful to provide some kind of framework for this (although bear in mind that in the case presented the framework was criticised by the project participants). Ask them to conduct the review of past, current and future scenarios.
- **Review the pilot** – assess the suitability of the approach and how well it achieved the purpose of encouraging openness and in depth review. This is crucial for generating meaningful statements.

> Scale up the pilot initial
> statement -generating exercise

Things to think about:
- **Contextual differences** – be aware that the pilot may have to be applied in a specific context, even with the care given to making the sample.
- **Recorders** – use recorders who can listen without bias and who can suspend judgement. Consider using non-project personnel for this.
- **Statement numbers** – encourage collection of all statements without filtering. The more that can be collected, the greater the like-

lihood of more insightful understanding. In the case presented here we collected 8,000 statements and it was manageable!

Sort the statements and develop indicators

Things to think about:
– **Select appropriate categories for sorting** – depending on the nature of the programme try to identify appropriate categories. The project participants can help with this. In our case, the categories were political, social, economic and natural resources and capability, describing different elements of empowerment. But remember, even if the project objective is economic empowerment, the benefits perceived by the participants might be much more far-reaching! Then, also sort according to levels of achievement, e.g. possible levels of empowerment might be something like: having information, acting on information, independent agency.
– **Developing indicators** – following sorting, develop indicators which reflect the essence of a number of statements. Remember that individual experience and evidence of realising a particular indicator may be different for the same indicator.

Design the evaluation tool

Things to think about:
– **Appropriateness of the tool** – the 'indicators' need to be organised into a tool that can be used with all of the project participant groups. The word and picture literacy capacity of the project participants needs to be taken into consideration when designing the evaluation tool. In this case, we used written statements which could be scored with happy/unhappy faces but later on it was realised that the statements needed to be illustrated to help illiterate members keep track. There are many different ways of organising the review of the indicator statements and innovation should be encouraged within the spirit of the approach. The tool must be clear enough for the group to manage the evaluation process themselves with facilitation help only from trained facilitators from among other groups. It must be unambiguous enough to

ensure universally similar interpretation. Consider the language of the indicator statements (local and colloquial) and consider whether pictures would help interpretation.

– **Coverage** – although in this case all groups undertook the evaluation, Carlos Barahona has clarified elsewhere in this publication that this is not necessary. However, the Members found the exercise essential and part of the empowerment process, so it was important that they all undertook the annual evaluation. There is always scope to conduct further analysis only on a sample subset.

– **Timing** – in this case evaluations were held throughout the year, but avoiding religious festivals. This was to accommodate coverage of the huge number of groups with a limited number of trained facilitators and to avoid facilitator fatigue. However, in smaller projects this would not be necessary. It is best to consult the groups themselves about timing.

– **Staff training** – local facilitators selected from among group members were used in our case. Training was provided through role play and observation rather than conventional training. The facilitators need to be non-judgemental, good communicators and, above all, excellent listeners. As there is no prescribed 'right answer', they need to be able to draw out different ideas and contradictions from the group members and encourage all members of the group to express their opinions. Consensus (which often entails concomitant compromise) is not privileged. These are important skills for the facilitators to develop. Organisation staff were trained as mentors, but this role could be outsourced to maintain objectivity in the approach.

– **Group use of data** – in our case, the groups used the analysis to develop their own annual action plans and make demands from the mother organisation. Consider how to help the groups/participants use their analyses optimally.

> Collate and analyse and
> report data

Things to think about:

– **Application of numerical values to answers** – this does not have to be done at community level. Since the group is reviewing its own progress in isolation from others, there is no need for a comparative score. However, some groups might like to give scores as they

can track their own progress from year to year. In our case, a unit value was given to all happy faces scored and then weighted depending on the empowerment level of the indicator (e.g. knowledge was weighted less than action). We used a binary numerical system, but marked scores could be accommodated easily to provide opportunities for a more nuanced analysis.

– **Data entry** – keep it simple! Enter only the basic data for each group which allows simple correlation analysis (variables such as gender, age of the group, location, ethnicity). Generation of aggregated data will provide a solid evidence base for the assessment of outcomes and impact.

– **Correlation analysis** – run simple variable analyses on the data sets as per project and funder needs. At this stage, the project participants are not involved. These are external analyses for results-based management purposes. They will give insights into the efficiency and effectiveness, project design and processes.

Our experience is that most of the results-based management needs for evaluation data are met through this approach. However, sample in-depth studies could be commissioned to enhance understanding. For example, since the groups may use different evidence to justify their indicator evaluation scores (they have dealt with different problems and issues) it might be interesting to establish the range of experience. This is conducive to case study investigation.

9 Lessons Learned

'The process of developing indicators that are relevant and useful often implies a consultation, broad-based, non-numerical approach that is used to synthesise and construct the indicators. The case that this paper presents is a good example of how this can be done within the context of a grassroots movement while maintaining some of the standards attributed to more traditional monitoring and evaluation/research methods'. (Carlos Barahona)

1. The problems associated with value-driven and agenda-driven definitions of empowerment can be solved by leaving this definition to those whose empowerment is being supported.
2. By asking a range of people whose empowerment is the focus of the programme to describe the process of empowerment, including envisioning future scope for empowerment, good indicators can be obtained which others can empathise with. Thus a standard tool can be developed that lends itself to quantitative analysis.
3. Self-assessed monitoring can meet the demands for rigour.
4. When assessing the costs of such a programme, the value added in terms of the reflection process also being empowering and thus contributing to the overall empowerment outcome should be included.
5. Recognition must be given to the fact that if those undertaking the reflection process demand it and give time to it they must be feeling a benefit. It is not for outsiders to suggest that this is too demanding.
6. Where an organisation is pioneering something new, donors' attitude is crucial. If the donors had embraced this innovation, offered assistance in terms of linking the organisation with advice and other organisations which were similarly cutting edge, plus taken the trouble to find out for themselves, the organisation would have had more confidence and could have developed and integrated the approach more quickly.
7. Monitoring and evaluation systems demanded from outside can distort the ethos of an organisation and its core values of rights-based programming. It is better to support a means for the organisation to assess its own progress in a way that is of primary use

and meaning to its members. The onus is then on the external organisations to make use of this data for its own needs after collection of the data rather than alter the way the organisation designs and manages their own process.

8. Where outcomes are inevitably context-specific, as is bound to be the case with rights-based programmes, the monitoring system must accommodate this. The GDI in this case allowed for asymmetric progression rather than linear progression required by conventional group development indicators and log frame logic.

We hope that through sharing this experience of a social movement in Bangladesh, development professionals and, in particular, donors, will feel that it is possible to support community-led monitoring and evaluation and assure transparency, rigour and reliability. Donors need to account for their actions to their Governments and taxpayers; they need to be able to convince those who are uncomfortable with outcomes that cannot be expressed econometrically or numerically. This case demonstrates that numerical values can be given to outcomes that are primarily relational and behavioural as well as social and political in nature. Most importantly, this can be done without distorting the purpose of collecting the information, which is for the Movement members' own use.

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Sida Studies in Evaluation

Measuring Empowerment? Ask Them

Quantifying qualitative outcomes from people's own analysis

Insights for results-based management
from the experience of a social movement in Bangladesh

The empowerment of people living in poverty is crucial for development. How to monitor and assess empowerment, is however a challenge. Empowerment is context-specific and therefore cannot be assessed on the basis of standard performance indicators. By contrast, monitoring and evaluation tools need to be inclusive, involving those in empowerment processes in order to ensure the relevance of data collected. At the same time, if we are interested in monitoring changes and trends, we need to find methods for aggregating such qualitative data in an adequate way.

This study shows how outcomes and trends in empowerment may be identified by quantifying qualitative data that were collected through participatory monitoring and evaluation. The methods presented are based on the experience of a social movement in Bangladesh. The movement is monitoring results of its work on the basis of indicators that were chosen by its members. This exercise has proven to be empowering in itself since local groups conduct the assessment and prepare their action on the basis of the results.