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Civil Society Challenge Fund (CSCF)

Visit to India and Nepal

Full Report (September 2012)

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List of Acronyms

CADAM	Centre for Alternative Dalit Media
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CSCF	Civil Society Challenge Fund (DFID)
CSD	Civil Society Department (DFID)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
COSAN	Community Support Association of Nepal
DFID	Department for International Development
DHRC	Disabled Human Rights Centre
GPAF	Global Poverty Action Fund (DFID)
HNFF	Himalaya Natural Fibre Foundation
LEADS	Livelihoods Education and Development Society
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
NBJK	Nav Bharat Jagruti Kendra
NOSKK	Nari-o-Sishu Kalyan Kendra
PACS	Poorest Areas Civil Society
PPA	Programme Partnership Agreement
PWD	People with Disabilities
SHG	Self-Help Group
VDC	Village Development Committee
VDEC	Village Development Education Committee

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Civil Society Challenge Fund (CSCF) supports 104 projects globally. It delivers results on DFID priority areas such as empowerment, accountability and gender. The Department for International Development's Civil Society Department (CSD) and Triple Line / Crown Agents have jointly developed a learning approach to draw out evidence on key priorities including the specific contribution made by civil society.

2. As part of the learning approach, in February 2012 CSD and Triple Line visited CSCF projects in India and Nepal. At the end of this executive summary is a summary of the projects referred to in this report.

3. Learning questions were developed across four key areas: Empowerment, Equity, Capacity Building and Monitoring and Evaluation. These were used in all interviews and project field visits. This report is based on lessons learned from visits to five CSCF projects, one Programme Partnership Arrangement (PPA) project and one Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS)[1] grantee in India and Nepal. A workshop was held in both countries, with 16 CSCF-funded organisations and three DFID India funded organisations in India and four in Nepal. The Nepal workshop also benefited from a representation made by the DFID-funded Enabling State Programme.

4. The following main findings are presented from these visits to help improve the understanding of the successes, opportunities and challenges faced within the CSCF. *A number of recommendations are provided in italics, aimed at DFID's CSD, the Fund Manager and CSCF grantees.*

5. The majority of lessons were around empowerment, which DFID defines in terms of **choice, challenge and change**:

   - **Choice** – poor people's capacities and access to opportunities, resources and services that enable them to make and act on choices about helping themselves and their families out of poverty.
   - **Challenge** – channels and institutions, such as social audits and parliamentary committees, that enable poor people to challenge corruption and ineffective delivery and hold officials and representatives to account for their commitments and responsibilities.
   - **Change** – political capacities and coalitions across society and between poor people and elites that will enable poor people to voice their concerns, have their interests represented in political processes and change the institutions and policies that keep them poor.

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[1] Funded by DFID India

Empowerment process

6. **Empowerment starts with the individual.** The process of empowerment is often illustrated with examples of collective action by groups exerting pressure on duty bearers. Yet many of the projects visited in both India and Nepal begun by working with individuals in their homes. This is a necessary strategy. For example, the West Bengali women supported by a project were not initially allowed, by their families, to meet as a group and the women were too afraid of reprisal to do so. Similar sentiments were voiced by impoverished women in a project visited in southern Nepal. In the home, individuals are introduced to new ideas and develop new aspirations, self-confidence and the courage to move out of the household and join with others with similar hopes. It is a **gradual and considered process** that brings about a **mind-set change.**

7. **Identifying the appropriate entry point is a crucial step** to engage individuals and establish trust. Entry points varied considerably across projects and could be philosophical or material in nature. Certain projects used notions of self-respect and dignity or inspirational leaders, either from the community or a philosophical discourse to engage people in the process. The teachings of B. R. Ambedkar[2] were fundamental to Dalit projects both in setting the project vision and for motivating people to become engaged. In other projects, where access to individuals was a challenge in itself and wider community buy-in was needed, more **tangible entry** points were required. Women who had suffered domestic violence in rural West Bengal were approached through child health programmes. The wellbeing of a child was motivational enough for all parents to accept and/or engage with the project. In Nepal, the entry point was around access to services for individuals (e.g. medicines for people with mental illnesses, provision of a mobile school for deprived children). It was clear that there is no one way to approach the community.

8. How the move from the private (concerns of the family, home and survival) to the public space (sharing experiences with others, interacting with society, demanding entitlements) occurs is context (and even household) specific. However, **working as a group and building a critical mass is a powerful** step in being heard by decision makers**.** Government officials in West Bengal described how it is (politically) difficult to ignore a large – and loud – group of people.

9. **Access to information** is an essential part of the empowerment process. Providing individuals and groups with appropriate and timely information had a stimulating and galvanising effect to help people try to claim their rights. With clear and simple information and guidance on how to use that information, groups can move from a sense of need to one of entitlement, and eventually to a growing sense of unity and partnership that may drive community action. Civil society, as an intermediary between communities and formal institutions, can play a key role in accessing, providing and sharing information – and crucially helping people to understand how to use their new knowledge to demand their rights. A number of CSOs in India and Nepal have provided a road map on how to define and demand rights and entitlements, access services, and work with or participate in institutions. This starts with simple steps, such as helping groups write

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[2] A Dalit political leader and Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Indian Constitution.

letters to government, support with job application forms and goes on to, for examples, helping communities develop influencing strategies.

10. Although there are clear steps to empowerment it is not a simple linear process. It is deeply affected by **the dynamic political, economic and social context.** This affects the scope and approaches that CSOs adopted. In India there are strong enabling institutions and mechanisms in place, for example the 2009 Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act. As such the focus of empowerment and accountability projects is upward, claiming existing rights, entitlements and services from duty bearers. A number of the projects were able to establish good relationships with government officials who saw the CSOs as supporting the government by helping to implement various acts by, for example, identifying potential beneficiaries in hard to reach areas. This recognises that change at the individual level needs to be accompanied by wider societal and, at times, international change.

11. In Nepal, there is a more challenging enabling environment. Although opportunities may be more limited in such a context, there is still a strong need to build the capacity of the nascent institutions, and identify and work with informal power structures and institutions who may be providing support in the absence of a formal structure. CSOs were using existing legal frameworks to engage communities and other stakeholders, for example informing people of their rights under the Gender Equality Act and Disability Law. Nonetheless, the opportunities are more limited in the Nepali context. Indeed, there can at times be a disconnect between awareness raising at the local level and the ability to advocate for changes in policies and practices at the national level.

12. **Empowerment has an intrinsic value to individuals and communities.** The outcome of the CSCF as a whole is to improve access to essential services and government policies and practices that affect the lives of beneficiaries. However, many of the project beneficiaries stated that the process, particularly being part of a group, was powerful in its own right. It gave them mental strength and helped them not to feel alone. This point is further demonstrated in that, for the majority of stakeholders interviewed, the ultimate indicator of empowerment is the ability to become **agents of change** in the lives of others. One mother of a deaf child said, *"I've been consulted by neighbours with deaf children, I can support them. I can reduce the challenges I faced".* This was described by one CSO organisation in India as the 'ripple' effect: an individual develops an increased sense of ownership over processes and institutions that affect their lives and this allows them to reach out to help others like them, and also to have the confidence to claim rights in other areas.

Implementing empowerment projects

13. Overall the India and Nepal visits highlighted a clear **comparative advantage of local civil society** over other actors (i.e. donors, government, international CSOs, private sector) in certain aspects of empowerment work. CSOs:

> ➢ Have the capacity to engage at the individual level, in some cases spending months working with a single individual to bring them out of their private space to access services or engage in public decision-making.
> ➢ Have local knowledge in terms of accessing and engaging harder to reach people and localities and identifying what developments are meaningful and will lead to wider change.
> ➢ Play an intermediary role linking formal and informal institutions to improve access to information.
> ➢ Play a complementary role to government campaigns and service delivery to identify and address unmet needs.

However, the visits also identify a number of other factors that should be considered when implementing empowerment projects.

14. **Having a strong and coherent vision clearly underpins any effective project.** The more successful projects had a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve in the long-term. Not only does it help to guide project activities, it also allows the organisations to understand the project as a specific intervention to achieve the vision. This is crucial where empowerment is a gradual process but donors often fund relatively short timeframes. For many this vision is best encapsulated in their organisational theory of change which justifies why they are implementing projects.

> ➢ *For CSD: For future DFID funds, grantees should be required to explain how and why project funding will contribute to their organisation's vision (this can also be explained as a theory of change).*
> ➢ *For CSD: Consider how funders can move from imposing a 'conventional' or (western-centric) vision of development and progress towards more locally defined notions that are culturally relevant. Consider also the challenges faced in presenting locally defined notions of development progress into outcomes that can be measured, understood and valued by UK tax payers?*

15. It was observed in India and Nepal that, though many of the projects were designed to promote a more equitable society, inequalities <u>within</u> groups were rarely touched upon. There is a general **lack of social analysis** underpinning the projects. In addition, gender analysis was not explicit or systematic in underpinning a project intervention, unless the intervention was gender-targeted such as Violence Against Women. This is despite the fact that all CSCF projects were asked at proposal stage to demonstrate how the project considered women and other excluded groups. Discrimination against groups on the basis of gender, caste, religion and disability can be deeply entrenched. Challenging this is important in achieving long term impact.

> ➢ *For CSD/Fund Manager: Develop clear guidance for grantees to set out DFID's requirements for social analysis, including gender analysis.*
> ➢ *For CSD/Fund Manager: Request CSOs provide a contextual analysis on power dynamics as part of the theory of change, demonstrating how it underpins the project's results, i.e. why empowerment is needed, and how this will help better results for the disadvantaged; the opportunities, risks and potential for lasting results; and how the analysis is used throughout the project cycle (i.e. re-visited in annual and mid-term reports).*

16. **Empowerment is an on-going process that needs to continuously adapt** as people begin to voice what's important to them, as needs are met and new requirements arise, as peoples aspirations evolve. Civil society is often uniquely placed to respond to this due to their access, understanding and relationships with communities. One Dalit rights project in India used education as their entry point, and their logframe was structured around this. However, they had quite quickly changed this to land and social rights based on the needs of the communities. The nature of project funding is that it is for a defined intervention and CSCF project management processes reflect this. At the same time there should be some scope to respond to changing realities on the ground.

> ➢ *CSD should reflect on how to 'flexibly' fund empowerment to better respond to changes in the context. For example, consider introducing a 'contingency fund' within empowerment and accountability projects earmarked specifically for seizing upon immediate opportunities and addressing sudden risks.*
> ➢ *CDS/Fund Manager should consider how to have more regular engagement on log frames to ensure they remain a living document for planning and monitoring.*
> ➢ *Fund managers: Consider how to support grantees in using clearly defined (and locally relevant) milestones that demonstrate progress towards achieving their objectives, and vision.*

17. **Clearly defined exit strategies in the project design are crucial for projects to achieve sustainability**. Successful CSOs tend to be those who have a clear plan to do themselves out of work. This can happen when the beneficiaries feel able to manage a process independent of the CSO or where groups claiming their rights start to pass on their skills to other groups or where service delivery is taken on by others such as government agencies or the private sector. Networks, relationships and the mode of engaging are crucial here.

> ➢ *For CSD: Consider funding longer-term evaluation timeframes, including after the project has ended, to assess the sustainability aspects of empowerment interventions.*

18. **The role of UK CSOs is not always clear.** The CSCF grant is with a UK CSO that provides capacity building to in-country implementing partners. However, it was not always clear what value the UK CSO brought in terms of contextual analysis, supporting monitoring and evaluation and learning, and delivering on reporting of results and capturing evidence. Despite this, there were some notable examples of good partnership:

providing strong due diligence in Nepal, and ensuring lessons from other projects are learned and improve practices in India and Nepal.

> ➢ *Fund Manager: UK CSOs should be required to outline in more specific terms their added value to a partnership in terms of analysis, capacity building, theory of change, M&E and Learning, value for money, and ensuring evidence-based results.*

19. In terms of measuring results, **CSOs have a key role to play in defining locally relevant indicators**. Civil Society can have the knowledge to know what success would look like, which tells us what development really means for individuals and communities. For example, one project intervention in India measured and resulted in Dalits no longer having to, or no longer being willing to remove their shoes in higher caste villages. This type of descriptive change is meaningful but difficult to use to build up an aggregated picture of change. A number of CSOs used the transfer of ownership of the process to the beneficiaries and the level of support the groups needed as an indicator (with clear milestones) of empowerment. For the CSO when the communities say, 'We don't need you', that is success. That said, all acknowledged the difficulties in measuring the results and impact of empowerment. Particular challenges are measuring the intrinsic value of empowerment and self-worth or measuring incremental, gradual changes within the life of a project. A final challenge identified is how to communicate the need for capturing robust results from the donor down the chain to the community workers who have the information but perhaps not the resources nor the know-how to measure results.

> ➢ *Fund Manager/CSCF grantees: Consider how to improve communication and capacity building for local partners to enable them to better capture hard-to-measure results.*
> ➢ *For CSD/Fund Manager: Explore how to collect and aggregate qualitative and quantitative findings to present an overall results story in thematic areas such as empowerment, equity and gender.*
> ➢ *For CSD: For other DFID funds (e.g. Global Poverty Action Fund) there needs to be clear guidance on how empowerment and accountability projects can demonstrate a line of sight to poverty reduction and their contribution to the Millennium Development Goals.*
> ➢ *For CSD: Consider the scope for a higher risk appetite for empowerment projects where results might take longer to materialise or for projects working in fragile and conflict affected states or regions with a weak enabling environment.*

20. A summary of the projects referred to in this report

CSCF 0500. Sustainable Empowerment of Excluded Women in Rural Nepal. *Learning for Life (UK Grantee). COSAN (Local Partner).* This project is working with excluded communities, particularly women, in rural Nepal to represent their needs to local government. The project has helped women gain the confidence to represent their views and needs to local government including in relation to domestic violence and reproductive health services. The project is also working with government officials to increase their ability to listen and communicate with remote communities and to respond appropriately.

CSCF 0467. Disabled People's Advocacy for Change, Nepal. *Disability and Development Partners (UK Grantee). Disabled Human Rights Centre (DHRC) (Partner).* This project empowers disabled people in post-conflict Nepal, politically, socially and culturally. Empowerment includes legal enfranchisement for the disabled

and the inclusion of their needs in national poverty reduction strategies. The project is supporting a private members bill on rights for people with severe disability. It is also leading efforts to develop a new mental health law and increasing access to information for people with disability.

CSCF 0444. Empowerment and Assertion of Rights of Natural Fibre Producers, Nepal. *Transrural Trust (UK Grantee). Himalaya Natural Fibre Foundation HNFF (Partner).*This project supports the fibre industry in Nepal and its domestic and international marketing networks. It is working closely with natural fibre producers in the Makalu-Barun National Park who are vulnerable and poor by facilitating their access to services and information, and by helping them to influence policies that affect their livelihoods. This project has recently assisted a community of natural fibre producers to partner with government to secure electrification. It has also introduced cash-on-delivery scheme so that women producers receive immediate rather than delayed payments.

CSCF 0462. Promoting Mental Health in Nepal. *Basic Needs (UK Grantee). LEADS (Partner).* This project supports people with mental disorders in remote areas who have no access to affordable services or to work. The project uses a mental health and development (MHD) model developed by Basic Needs to reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues. It has brought about an increase in the number of people receiving regular treatment in two districts and an increase in access to work for those who had none. The project has also worked with government health departments to ensure that mental health data is recorded.

CSCF 0515. Improving Access of Dalit Children to Primary Education in Bundelkhand through Advocacy and Empowerment by Regional Dalit Rights Platform, India. *Voice of Dalit International (UK Grantee). Centre for Alternative Dalit Media (CADAM) (Partner).* This project supports access to Primary Education for Dalit children in 200 villages in 7 districts in Uttar Pradesh and 5 in Madhya Pradesh in India. Dalits are a marginalised sub-caste group who are amongst the poorest communities in India. The project has recently improved the enrolment and retention of Dalit children in schools (particularly girls) as well as the overall functioning of government primary schools so that stigma is reduced.

CSCF 0509. Promoting Mental Health and Development in Bihar and Jharkhand States, India. *Basic Needs (UK Grantee). Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra (NBJK) (Partner).* This project addresses the needs of people with mental health disorders in Bihar and Jharkhand states. It is increasing access to mental health services amongst marginalised groups and demonstrating reduced symptoms. It is providing access to loans, grants and saving schemes so those who are able can start income generating activities. The project also works closely with district government to expand government mental services where coverage is poor.

CSCF 0459. Accessing Disability Rights in Bihar and Jharkhand, India. *Action Village India (UK Grantee). Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra (NBJK) (Partner).*This project supports people living with disabilities (PWD) of 20 areas in 5 Districts of Bihar and Jharkhand to access services and support they are entitled to under the provisions of The Persons With Disabilities (PWD) Act of 1995 (e.g., equal opportunities, protection of rights and full political and social participation). Recently the project has helped over 15,000 disabled people access services and financial support through disability certificates.

CSCF 0408. Rights of Deaf Children and their Families, India. *Deaf Child Worldwide (UK Grantee). Sanchar (Partner).* This project works with the parents of deaf children and other family member to care for and promote the needs of deaf children in four states. This year the project and parents groups have persuaded the National Institute for Hearing Handicapped to assess and make recommendations for audiologists in district hospitals. The project also supports training for parents in understanding how to mend children's hearing aids.

Nari-o-Sishu Kalyan Kendra (NOSKK) is a women-led organization established in 1979 that now includes: women from Muslim communities, migrating women and child labourers, and women and children from scheduled castes and from other socially excluded communities. NOSKK is supported by the DFID India's Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) programme. It works in 451 villages in 4 districts of West Bengal providing: non-discriminatory access to work under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA); improved access to job-related skill development; access to non-discriminatory health services; and better and non-discriminatory education for children belonging to socially excluded groups, especially girls.

2. INTRODUCTION

1. The Civil Society Challenge Fund (CSCF) supports 104 projects globally. It delivers results on DFID priority areas such as empowerment, accountability and gender. The Department for International Development's Civil Society Department (CSD) and Triple Line / Crown Agents have jointly developed a learning approach to draw out evidence on key priorities including the specific contribution made by civil society.

2. **What subject areas are we interested in?** Through an analysis of the CSCF portfolio in 2010-11 Triple Line identified a number of subjects which could be explored further to demonstrate results and inform learning and these include: (a) Education for Girls (in particular access to and quality of education), (b) Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights, (c) Disability (including mental health), (d) Access to Justice and Rule of Law (particularly related to marginalised and excluded groups, child protection and violence against women) and (e) HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis. This report focuses mainly on (a) and (c). Other subjects will be covered in future learning visits.

3. As part of the learning approach, in February 2012 CSD and Triple Line visited CSCF projects in India and Nepal. Learning questions were developed across four key areas and used in all interviews and project field visits: Empowerment, Equity, Capacity Building and Monitoring and Evaluation. This report is based on lessons learned from visits to five CSCF projects, one Programme Partnership Arrangement (PPA) project and one Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS)[3] grantee in India and Nepal. A workshop was held in both countries, with 16 CSCF-funded organisations in India and four in Nepal. The Nepal workshop also benefited from a presentation made by the DFID-funded Enabling State Programme.

4. **What questions informed our approach?**

    a. *Empowerment:* How have empowered individuals and/or communities been able to negotiate and advocate for better outcomes with decision makers and service providers? What changes resulted from such negotiation in terms of a) service delivery (relevance, quality, availability, access), b) political participation, c) economic participation and d) household decision making?
    b. *Equity:* Which intervention strategies are most influential in breaking down barriers to reach and listen to the voice of marginalised and excluded groups and in particular women? Are there any particular approaches which have demonstrably contributed to a change in government policy or practice?
    c. *Capacity building:* Which approaches to capacity building of local partners and community groups have been most impressive in achieving project outcomes, and in particular improved the capacity and ability of women to take a leadership role?
    d. *Monitoring & Evaluation:* What tools and methods have been most useful and practical in measuring and demonstrating evidence of results including disaggregation of data?

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[3] Funded by DFID India

5. **How and where are we learning?** The learning was largely based on project visits and a workshop on empowerment, equity, capacity building and M&E in each country (see terms of reference – appendix a). In advance of both visits we agreed learning questions and principles (e.g. how we defined empowerment, value for money and beneficiaries). One team visited India and one visited Nepal gathering insights from five CSCF projects in total and from stakeholder workshops.

6. **Content and structure of report.** The report is therefore structured around lessons learned from the empowerment process as demonstrated by the CSCF projects visited. This is followed by a section on managing empowerment projects which brings in the other learning issues of equity, capacity building and M&E. In addition the report covers sustainability which was seen as crucial in looking at the lasting impact of empowerment work. The report also includes a number of results coming out of the empowerment projects so far. The report ends with a summary of next steps and recommendations.
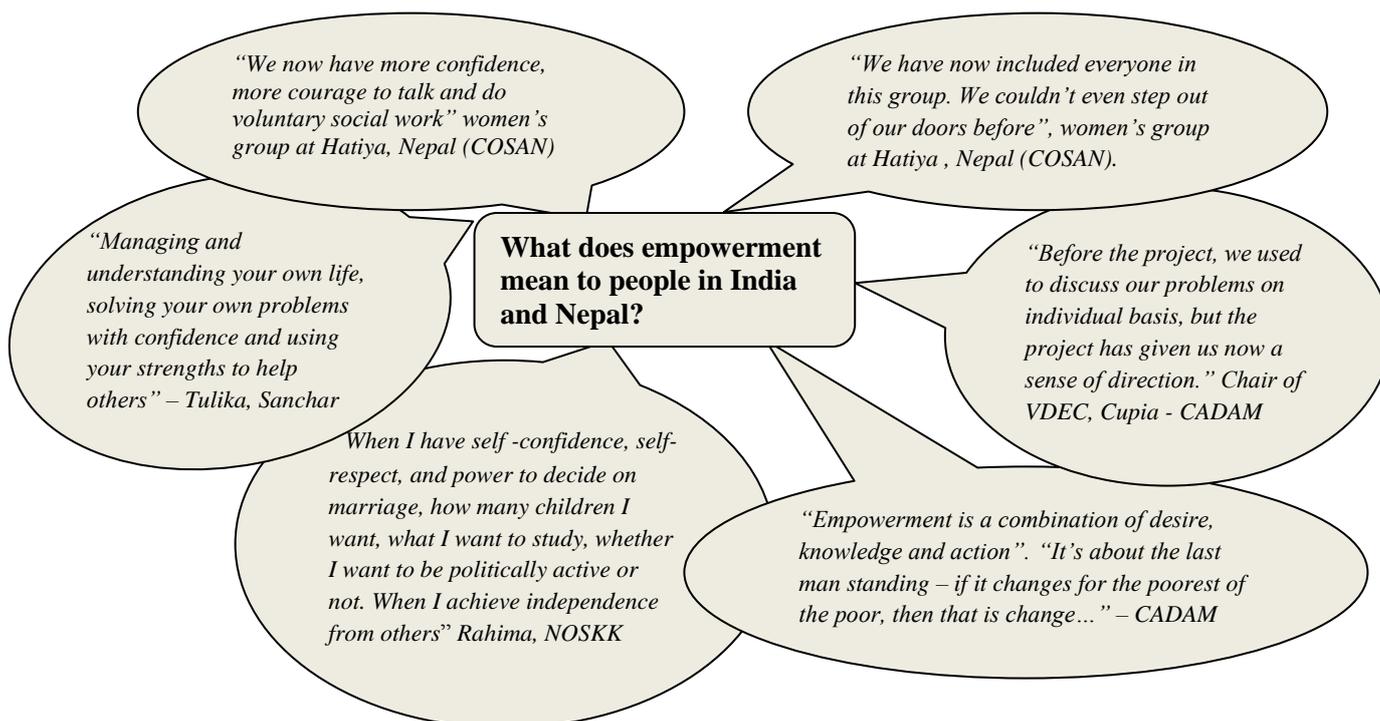
3. THE EMPOWERMENT PROCESS

3.1 An understanding of empowerment

7. We used DFID's definition of empowerment which is defined in terms of **choice, challenge and change.** The projects visited clearly show aspects of one or more of the following:

   - **Choice** – poor people's capacities and access to opportunities, resources and services that enable them to make and act on choices about helping themselves and their families out of poverty.
   - **Challenge** – channels and institutions, such as social audits and parliamentary committees, that enable poor people to challenge corruption and ineffective delivery and hold officials and representatives to account for their commitments and responsibilities.
   - **Change** – political capacities and coalitions across society and between poor people and elites that will enable poor people to voice their concerns, have their interests represented in political processes and change the institutions and policies that keep them poor.

8. Through the projects visited in India and Nepal we noted that the empowerment process starts with an intervention (or agency) aimed at the empowerment of an individual who is provided with information to make a choice which leads to taking action together with others who are in a similar position in order to make a lasting and sustainable change in their lives, thus changing the rules of the game (e.g. implementation of a policy, improved quality of a service).

9. The projects demonstrated that empowerment is far from linear and is deeply affected by context, changing circumstances and other external factors (at times unforeseen or even unidentified) and in turn it may have its own unintended consequences. It could be better illustrated as a continuous process:
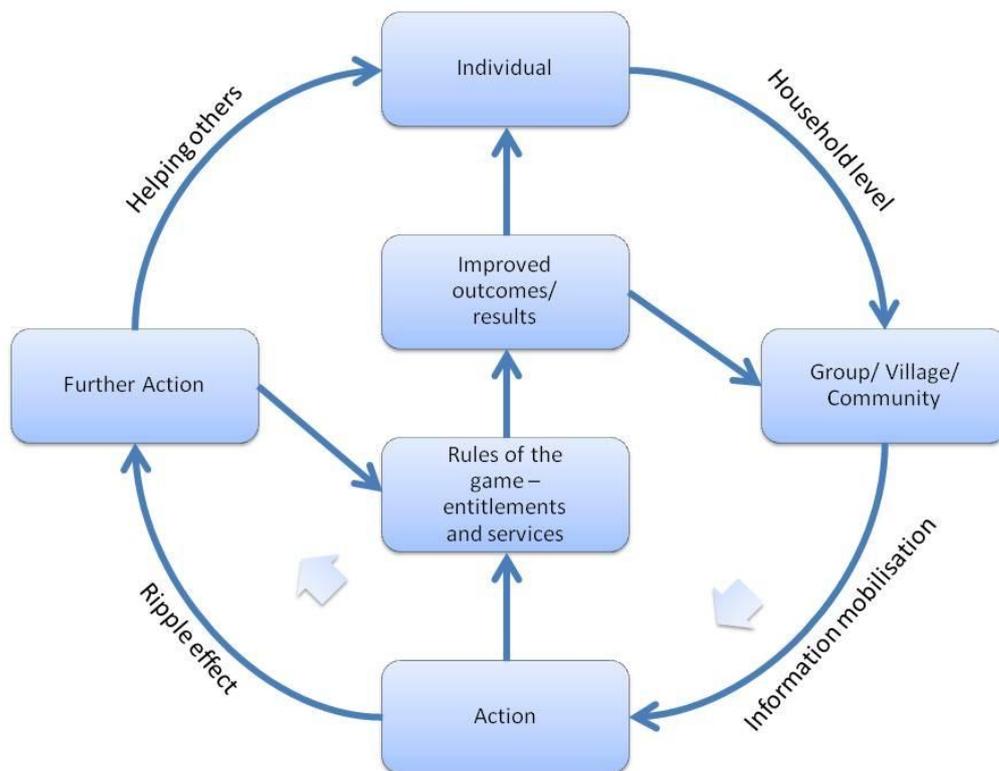
10. For the projects visited, empowerment can mean a number of different things to different people as illustrated by the selection of quotes from stakeholder below:

"We now have more confidence, more courage to talk and do voluntary social work" women's group at Hatiya, Nepal (COSAN)

"We have now included everyone in this group. We couldn't even step out of our doors before", women's group at Hatiya , Nepal (COSAN).

"Managing and understanding your own life, solving your own problems with confidence and using your strengths to help others" – Tulika, Sanchar

What does empowerment mean to people in India and Nepal?

"Before the project, we used to discuss our problems on individual basis, but the project has given us now a sense of direction." Chair of VDEC, Cupia - CADAM

When I have self -confidence, self-respect, and power to decide on marriage, how many children I want, what I want to study, whether I want to be politically active or not. When I achieve independence from others" Rahima, NOSKK

"Empowerment is a combination of desire, knowledge and action". "It's about the last man standing – if it changes for the poorest of the poor, then that is change…" – CADAM

3.2 Empowerment starts with the individual

11. The process of empowerment is often illustrated with examples of collective action by groups exerting pressure on duty bearers. Yet many of the projects visited in both India and Nepal begun by working with individuals in their homes. This is a necessary strategy and can take various forms (see box below). For example the West Bengal women supported by a project were not initially allowed, by their families, to meet as a group and the women were too afraid of reprisal to do so. Similar sentiments were voiced by impoverished women in a project visited in southern Nepal. In the home, individuals are introduced to new ideas. As a result, they develop new aspirations, self-confidence and the courage to move out of the household and join with others with similar hopes. It is a **gradual and considered process** that brings about a **mind-set change.**

12. Changing mind sets takes time. Empowerment starts with the self-realisation of an individual. An approach found in India and Nepal began this process by building self-esteem and self-confidence of individuals. At the same time CSOs also talked about the challenge of changing mind sets of people in power, hence some projects were engaged in facilitating empowerment of government officials (e.g. LEADS

> **Strategies identified for individual empowerment:**
> - Individual/couple/family counselling in moving individuals from the private (e.g. home) to the public domain (e.g. community meetings).
> - Intense engagement at individual / household level in building confidence, providing motivation, affecting mind sets (e.g. with a child, couple or individual depending on issues/process).

with raising awareness on mental health in Nepal, COSAN with training VDC officials in Nepal).

13. 'Hope' was a sentiment commonly expressed by individuals. For example, 'hope' expressed by parents of disadvantaged children (e.g. Dalits and disabled) that their children will acquire knowledge/skills from education and have a better life is what drives parents to send their children to school or agree to supplementary education classes.

3.3 Identifying the entry points

14. Identifying the appropriate entry point is a crucial step to engage individuals and establish trust. Entry points varied considerably across projects and could be philosophical or material in nature. Certain projects used notions of self-respect and dignity or inspirational leaders, either from the community or a philosophical discourse to engage people in the process. The teachings of B. R. Ambedkar[4] were fundamental to Dalit projects both in setting the project vision and for motivating people to become engaged. One Dalit rights project (CADAM) had used education as their entry point, but quite quickly changed this to land rights based on the needs of the community. When asked

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[4] A Dalit political leader and Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Indian Constitution.

why they had started with education they replied that Ambedkar charged their community to *'Educate, agitate, organise'*.

Photograph: R. Burge

15. In other projects, where access to individuals was a challenge in itself and wider community buy-in was needed, more **tangible entry** points were required. Women who had suffered domestic violence in rural West Bengal were approached through child health programmes. The wellbeing of a child was motivational enough for parents to accept and/or engage with the project. In Nepal the entry point was around access to services for individuals (e.g. medicines for people with mental illnesses, provision of a mobile school for deprived children). It was clear that there is no one way to approach the community; the CSO must use its local knowledge to find what is meaningful for the different individuals and communities.

16. **Strategies around identifying entry points:**

- Building trust: Sanchar (India) started with home-based visits to build trust and rapport amongst women. COSAN (Nepal) encouraged women living in remote areas to 'venture' out of their homes, and worked with men to accept this approach.
- Focusing on the child: A common concern for parents, the child's wellbeing provides the urge and motivation to participate in empowerment projects. Thus, in India we were told, *'start with the well-being of a child as everyone can understand this'*. NOSKK (India) focused on the child as a means to access the mother – child to mother approach. (Health issues were not their focus but rather an entry point to empowerment work). COSAN (Nepal) focused on providing education for children from the poorest backgrounds to engage communities on wider empowerment issues.

Photograph: J. Chambers

- Developing skills, increasing incomes: Providing vocational training for women (e.g. India lace-making, Nepalese natural fibres) to increase confidence and incomes was seen as part of the process of empowerment for NOSKK and HNFF respectively.
- Providing services: Service delivery through a project (e.g. medicines, hearing aids, training, wheelchairs, micro-credit, school fees) can provide an entry point into addressing wider issues of access and quality of services. Establishing

savings groups for example can act as the starting point for women to become more economically independent.

3.4 Group empowerment

21. As the individual works together with the CSO, being introduced to new ideas and developing new aspirations or skills, they undergo a perception and behavioural shift. How the move from the private (concerns of the family, home and survival) to the public space (sharing experiences with others, interacting with society, demanding entitlements) occurs is context (and even household) specific. However, **working as a group and building a critical mass is a powerful** step in being heard by decision makers**.** Government officials in West Bengal described how it is (politically) difficult to ignore a large – and loud – group of people. As one voice is added to another, the voice is raised and people start to listen, be it in community decision-making processes, or engaging with government or religious leaders. Attitudes towards disadvantaged groups

Photograph: J. Chambers

change when people work under the banner of groups. *"At first the Brahmin caste wouldn't listen but as they [Dalit advocacy group] grow in size they could project their voice and now Dalits are in teacher positions".* Another powerful example of this was seen in how one women's group in southern Nepal became animated in their actions against incidents of domestic violence. Evidence is required to see how attitudes towards domestic violence have changed as a result of such actions.

22. Empowerment then is also about **helping others**. From being a stronger individual to feeling responsible for others is one thread that came through a number of times during the project visits. Helping others seems to lead to greater sense of empowerment, as in the case with the self-help group (SHG) members of NBJK (India), integrating people with mental illnesses in SHGs (for example, the LEADS project in Nepal) and women encouraging the formation of new women's groups (for example, the COSAN project in Nepal).

> *"I feel incredibly empowered by this ability to reduce the challenges of others".* Sanchar Mother of a deaf child, West Bengal (India)

23. A couple of women's groups expressed the need to **overcome fear** (NOSKK, COSAN). As women identify common issues they can see the value of coming together in solidarity. This helps them to move from the private sphere to the public domain. It is important that people have a safe space to talk and share their views; to develop their self-worth, discuss new ideas and formulate their demands. In Nepal, it was evident that social empowerment of individuals (e.g. people with mental health

> *"Since I take part in the SHGs for disabled people, I feel equal to other villagers, and can express my views as a full citizen".* A member of SHG-NBJK (India)

issues) and groups (e.g. women's community action groups) is leading to change at the local level in terms of how their voices are heard in communities, how they have mobilised to take action, how others are responding to their needs. There is anecdotal but tangible evidence of cumulative impact. While there may be gains in social empowerment there is however less evidence of economic empowerment within the projects visited. This is a particular concern for women's groups in Makwanpur in Nepal who expressed how they still don't have access to or control of assets and resources in their households.

24. Group empowerment can lead to collective action going beyond the local level. There is some evidence of an increase in the sense of ownership over national processes and institutions which were not necessarily the immediate focus for individuals and groups at the outset of a project. For example, under the new social security systems in India Dalits can request entitlements as a result of having claimed under the Rights Act. In Nepal, disabled people have come together to advocate for inclusion of People with Disabilities in the national census and a re-writing of the Disability Law. These are examples of what some call a **'domino effect'**; by having demanded rights and entitlements (whether successfully or not!) this can lead to greater confidence and know-how to advocate on other issues.

25. **Strategies for group empowerment:** Strategies employed by CSOs to engage and empower groups are multifarious, be they community mobilisation, working in synergy with others or advocating for inclusive representation.

> **Working in synergy with others**
> - The more successful empowerment initiatives tended to be those which engaged all stakeholders and the target groups, promoting inclusiveness and harmony in the process, and building on trust and respect established through a track record of engagement (e.g. COSAN, Nepal).
> - Actively involve others including those who may be regarded as an obstacle to empowerment. For example the NOSKK project in India involves the men, particularly in crisis situations, also holds mixed village meetings and engages with Muslim leaders and academia (e.g. At Eid, encourage Imams to make statements).
> - In some cases such involvement may need to be sequenced (e.g. for CADAM in India it is considered as too soon to involve non Dalit communities from higher castes although the Dalit Village Education Committee includes the Adivasis – another disadvantaged group).

Photograph: S. Asfaha

Community mobilisation – strength in numbers!

- Creating a public platform to create a shift from the private to the public domain – importance of creating social space for the disadvantaged groups to develop an independent self-worth (NBJK, India).
- Gather strength through coming together as a group – which itself leads to increased courage (e.g. women's community action groups in Nepal, NOSKK project in India). "Numbers matter" – achieving a 'critical mass' in shifting power relations with government.

> *"As a group we can stand against the fear of being badly treated by our husbands / in-laws for leaving the house".* NOSKK women (India)

Advocating for political mechanisms to ensure representation of all groups

- In Nepal, political empowerment tended to be focused around achieving 33% representation of women in local political structures, as stipulated by law. The challenge is achieving real representation. Inherent is the question: who can legitimately claim to represent others? During discussions we heard that the very marginalised do not feel they are represented even when numerical targets are reached. One way of over-coming this from COSAN's viewpoint is to work directly with marginalised and excluded groups and help them choose their own representatives.

Facilitate institutional (formal and informal) linkages

- CSOs play an important role in facilitating interaction with other institutions: informal, such as communities and formal, such as School Management Committees. Being included in community structures (e.g. VDEC-CADAM, India), helps Dalit communities claim their space and voice.

3.5 Access to information

26. Access to information is an essential part of the empowerment process. Providing individuals and groups with appropriate and timely information had a stimulating and galvanising effect in helping people claim their rights. With clear and simple information, guidance on how to use that information and some kind of hand holding (in particular at the start), groups can move from a sense of need to one of entitlement, and eventually to a growing sense of unity and partnership that may drive community action.

27. Civil society, as an intermediary between communities and formal institutions, can play a key role in accessing, providing and sharing information – and crucially helping people to understand how to use their new knowledge to demand their rights. A number of CSOs in India and Nepal have provided a clear understanding of how to define and demand rights and entitlements, access services, and work with or participate in institutions. This starts with simple steps, such as helping groups write letters to government, support with job application forms and goes on to, for examples, helping communities develop influencing strategies.

Photograph: S. Asfaha

28. Information is not seen as something that is discrete but as a detailed understanding of the whole process of how to access services, define and demand rights and participate in institutional processes. This view was expressed by one woman member of the SHG in Hazaribag district (see box above). Information can lead to knowledge and action which in turn can trigger a shift in power relations. With better information and knowledge comes a growing sense of unity and partnership with other groups, communities and CSOs, and a sense of ownership in the processes and institutions which affects the lives of people. Knowing how to use information increases self-confidence. In addition, learning how to navigate the 'system' is highly valued. It can at first lead to a sense of deprivation which in turn can drive the will for action as expressed by Dalit groups we interviewed. The use of information is key to projects in Nepal where people are informed for example about their rights and entitlements as a disabled person (Disability Law), the right to be educated (Nepali Education Act) and to protect them against violence (Domestic Violence Bill).

> *"Initially we knew limited information, understanding the whole process is a great relief to access our disability certificate, we are now able to talk to the district collector to claim our rights",* Member of the Federation in Hazaribag district, NBJK (India).

3.6 Empowerment in context

29. Although there are indications of some clear and common steps to empowerment it is not a simple linear process. It is deeply affected by **the dynamic political, economic and social context.** There can be deep-rooted historical and cultural reasons why it is easier for CSOs to achieve their empowerment objectives in some countries or regions than in others. It doesn't matter how logical an approach or model appears on paper, if the circumstances are not right then the opportunities for change are going to be even more challenging. Changes in the context, for example elections of a new government, passage of a law on sexual equality, end of a conflict, can lead to opportunities for CSOs to carry out successful empowerment work. CSOs must be able to identify and seize upon these opportunities.

30. In India there are some strong enabling institutions and mechanisms in place, for example the 2009 Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act. As such the focus of empowerment tends to be upwards (i.e. making demands) – claiming existing rights, entitlements and services from duty bearers. A number of the projects were able to establish good relationships with government officials who saw the CSOs as supporting

the government by helping to implement various Acts of parliament by, for example identifying potential beneficiaries in hard to reach areas.

31. A **favourable policy climate** – in particular legal frameworks, a political will to implement policy and the availability of institutional arrangements – are key triggers to community action. In the case of Dalits in India, rights-based legislation has had a mobilising effect. One staff member of CADAM for example called this a *"weapon to carry and given to us by the government"*. While in India the favourable climate has become a motivating factor for CSOs to mobilise communities to claim their rights, in Nepal the enabling environment may not be as conducive. In India, while CSOs were using existing legal frameworks to engage communities and other stakeholders, for example informing people of their rights under the Gender Equality Act and Disability

Law, in Nepal there appeared to be gaps. For example, the gap between community expectations raised through CSOs providing information and education at the local level and the ability of CSOs and communities to advocate for changes in policies and practices at the national level. When a favourable enabling environment is less in evidence, CSOs must build the capacity of nascent institutions and possibly take a more staged approach to achieving gains at a slower pace and within the limits of existing legal frameworks.

32. One of the challenges faced in both countries is that of the governance and representation of local institutions. At the local level a number of the state-established institutions have been 'captured' by elite groups (e.g. upper class, political parties) which are not seen to be representative of all of the community and

> **Strategies for engaging with government and political parties:**
> - In Nepal and India CSOs were clearly aware of the need to integrate their projects with existing government structures or programmes. They demonstrated how this can lead to opportunities to influence and strengthen government practices, such as the use of mental health data in the Health Management Information Systems (HMIS), budget allocations of the Village Development Committees (VDCs) in Nepal, and government social schemes being extended to Dalits/Adivasis in India.
> - Engagement with government can lead to new strategies which bridge differences and find common ground. For example, COSAN has engaged with political parties in the VDCs in a way which identifies common ground in different political manifestos and builds a consensus around service delivery (e.g. health and education development goals). HNFF encouraged women's groups to work collectively to engage with local authorities on more transparent revenue collection.
> - A strong approach to empowerment is to raise awareness of marginalised and excluded people's rights and entitlements particularly if they are already enshrined in local development plans (e.g. VDC plans – COSAN, Nepal); how to access such resources and services; and engage with – or facilitate the engagement of – target groups in local development (committee) meetings.

in particular excluded and marginalised groups. This is resulting in a number of CSOs setting up parallel institutions or trying to influence existing institutions to be more

inclusive (e.g. Village Development Committees, Village Dalit Education Committees in the Indian context). In Nepal an added dimension is that the environment is more challenging for civil society with a high degree of politicisation of everyday life including in areas of health and education.

33. To **achieve the best results in empowerment** a combination of a favourable policy climate and the presence of governance structures (at local and national level) is required. Two elements are also important: accountable service delivery institutions; and strong community institutions including CSOs who are able to mediate and facilitate. In one particular case, while there is a favourable climate with community institutions and active CSOs, the institutional arrangements do not exist and this will have an impact on results and achievements (Basic Needs/NBJK work in Bihar- India)[5]. Likewise, the lack of strong community institutions and community leadership delays the achievement of desired results affecting empowerment of communities.

> ➢ *Recommendation (for CSD/Fund Manager): Request CSOs to provide a contextual analysis on power dynamics as part of the theory of change, demonstrating how it underpins the project's results, i.e. why empowerment is needed, and how this will help better results for the disadvantaged; the opportunities, risks and potential for lasting results; and how the analysis is used throughout the project cycle (i.e. re-visited in annual and mid-term reports).*
> ➢ *Recommendation (for CSD): Consider the scope for a higher risk appetite for empowerment projects where results might take longer to materialise or for projects working in fragile and conflict affected states or regions with a weak enabling environment.*

3.7 Change agents

34. Empowerment has an intrinsic value to individuals and communities. The outcome of the CSCF as a whole is to improve access to essential services and government policies and practices that affect the lives of beneficiaries. However, many of the project beneficiaries stated that an empowerment process, particularly being part of a group, was powerful in its own right. It gave people

Strategies identified for building change agents:
- Demonstrating to communities how individuals can break out of poverty within the same locality (e.g. through provision of micro finance activities to disabled women, NBJK project in India).
- Using inspirational leaders such as Sabitri Baiphuli, first female Dalit teacher in India, to encourage others to act.
- Supporting the emergence of new leaders from community groups and within CSOs.
- Identifying parents of older children who can inspire for those with younger ones (e.g. Sanchar, India).

mental strength and helped them not to feel alone. This point is further demonstrated in

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[5]. Although the political climate is in favour for disability, Bihar State has not put provisions or institutional arrangement to provide support to mentally ill people contrary to Jharkhand State where two psychiatrist centres exist and the project is collaborating with them.

that, for the majority of stakeholders interviewed the ultimate indicator of empowerment is the ability to become agents of change in the lives of others – **change agents**. This was described by one CSO organisation in India as the 'ripple' effect: an individual develops an increased sense of ownership over processes and institutions that affect their lives and this allows them reach out to help others like them.

Photograph: J. Chambers

35. **Changes at the individual level can see changes for a group**: No longer feeling alone gives one the power to help others in a similar situation. Simply being part of a process to demand change with others can create an increased sense of control and confidence within an individual and a group.

4. MANAGING EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS

4.1 Comparative advantage of civil society

36. Overall, the India and Nepal visits highlighted a **comparative advantage of local and national civil society** over other actors (i.e. donors, government, international CSOs, private sector) in certain aspects of empowerment work. This advantage can be demonstrated in various ways as highlighted in the table below. This provides DFID with a rationale as to the value added of supporting CSOs particularly in terms of effectiveness (ensuring that the outputs deliver the desired level of outcome).

37. Table 1: comparative advantage of supporting CSOs

Comparative advantage of supporting civil society in India	Comparative advantage of supporting civil society in Nepal
Plays a complementary role to government campaigns and service delivery: particularly so with National government campaigns. For example, with CADAM and education: new government programme (Save the Girl Campaign, which includes stipends and scholarships) is very much at national (macro / mezzo levels). CSOs / CBOs play a much more intensive role at community level and are key in reaching those communities *(government official – education officer, district level, CADAM*	**Plays a complementary role to government campaigns and service delivery:** particularly at the local level with training and support for example to health clinics on issues of mental health; and in building the capacity of village development committees to carry out their mandate to fund excluded and poor groups. Less obvious at the national level due partly to policy-making environment.
	Identify and address unmet needs: clearly

project.)

Identify and address unmet needs: What is needed at the field level is not provided by government; huge gaps exist. CSOs are key in bringing those programmes to the people, government relies on them

Have local knowledge in terms of accessing and engaging harder to reach people and localities: Government of West Bengal uses reach as a key assessment criteria to identify service providers (links to communities etc) – *"we would not be able to implement this programme if it weren't for NOSKK"*

Have the time to engage at the individual level, in some cases spending months working with a single individual to bring them out of their private space to access services and engage in public decision-making: Being rooted within the communities or having worked with the same communities for a long period, and using social mobilisers from communities (CADAM and NBJK).

Play an intermediary role linking formal and informal institutions to improve access to information and services: Incentive for government to respond to demands because they depend on votes, and therefore minority demands can impact on decision making (CADAM). The SHGs at federation levels (NBJK) are working in tandem with government institutions, such as Jharkhand Disability Commission to access the benefits of The Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD Act) 1995.

Inspiration by moral authorities (change agents): One of the main driving forces for CSOs visited (NBJK, CADAM) is the moral authority and philosophical inspiration emanating from the great Indian leaders like Gandhi and Ambedkar. This shapes their vision of empowerment and exerts great

filling gaps that exist, such as reaching people with mental illnesses, advocating for the rights of disabled persons, supporting the education of children out-of-school living and/or living in remote areas.

Have local knowledge in terms of accessing and engaging harder to reach people and localities: operates in places that are either inaccessible or not prioritised by other stakeholders particularly the local government institutions but also by other CSOs. This includes remote communities in the Himalayas (HNFF).

Have the time to engage at the individual level, in some cases spending months working with a single individual to bring them out of their private space to access services and engage in public decision-making: Knowing how to respect, listen and work with poor and excluded individuals and communities. This is a fundamental approach of social mobilisers (LEADS and COSAN).

Play an intermediary role linking formal and informal institutions to improve access to information and services: At the national level this is clearly seen with the Disability Human Rights Centre (ref: Disability Law). At the local level, the advocacy appears to be more with the VDCs and local hospitals and health clinics. There is however a gap between local advocacy and national-level influence and engagement.

Motivation and direction: At the local level CSOs can play a significant role in enthusing and motivating people, from both the experience of the leadership and the field staff (e.g. social mobilisers).Both communities and government officials respect this. . The pressure is the demand by all for 'more' in terms of technical support, know-how and capacity building.

influence on the communities they support. **Motivation and direction:** CSOs can provide an inspirational role themselves to communities – providing tools, know-how, direction, vision. In India there seems to be an increased recognition by authorities and service providers of the skills and experiences of CSOs.	

38. While the comparative advantage of local civil society is clear, there are a number of factors which need to be considered in the implementation and management of empowerment projects.

4.2 The importance of a vision

39. Having a strong and coherent **vision** clearly underpins any effective project. The more successful projects had a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve in the long-term. Not only does a vision help to guide project activities it also allows the organisations to understand the project as a specific intervention to achieve the vision. This is crucial where empowerment is a gradual process but donors often fund relatively short timeframes. For many this vision is best encapsulated in their organisational theory of change which justifies why they are implementing projects.

> ➤ *Recommendation (For CSD): For future DFID funds, grantees should be required to explain how and why project funding will contribute to their organisation's vision (this can also be explained as a theory of change).*
> ➤ *Recommendation (For CSD): Consider how funders can move from imposing a 'conventional' or (western-centric) vision of development and progress towards more locally defined notions that are culturally relevant. Consider also the challenges faced in presenting locally defined notions of development progress into outcomes that can be measured, understood and valued by UK tax payers?*

4.3 Addressing equity

40. A number of the CSCF projects aimed to address **equity** issues for marginalised groups, such as Dalits, the disabled or Muslim women. However, it was observed in India and Nepal that inequalities <u>within</u> groups were rarely touched upon even though not all members were equally represented or that significant inequalities may exist within the same group. The following issues around equity came to light during project visits:

- **Narrow focus on equity:** for some projects in India and Nepal the focus on equity is more about equity between groups, e.g. Dalits v upper castes, disabled v non-disabled, men v women. Intra-group equity (i.e. within groups) in terms of class, caste, gender and wealth is not yet clearly visible in the contextual analysis or project design. This is because most projects take as their starting point: how to target disadvantaged communities. For example, in the LEADS (Nepal) and NBJK (India) projects there are a few mentally affected members within the SHGs of PWDs. However, the level to which they are integrated within the PWD-SHGs is unclear; the most vocal members of these groups seem to be those with physical disabilities and those generally with higher educational background. There is not a strategy to promote equity within the same groups.

> *"Stigma multiplies if a deaf child is a girl. It's the social malice of our society".* Sanchar father (India)
>
> *"I dream for Anwesha [deaf daughter] to be self reliant and independent. But, I don't want her to marry, that's where the danger of abuse starts.* Sanchar mother (India)
>
> *"Collectively we can raise our finger against any violence towards women",* women's group at Kalidamar (Nepal)

- **Visibility:** While projects are targeting the most excluded as a whole community harmony can be encouraged amongst quite diverse groups. Efforts may however disguise the fact that particular 'sub-groups' are not always visible or vocal in their community, such as disabled, sexual minorities, Madhesi, Muslims and other minorities, disabled girls, Dalit girls.

- **Organisational ethos:** Some CSOs in India and Nepal do not clearly demonstrate inclusive boards of trustees, internal democracy, and a willingness to challenge. The importance of organisations mirroring their vision based on these principles was highlighted. An example of good practice can be seen in the governance structures established for LEADS in Nepal which learnt from weaknesses in a previous partnership.

- **Gender analysis:** There is generally a lack of an explicit and systematic gender analysis underpinning a project intervention and its potential impact. For example, one of the recurring problems leading to mental illnesses as expressed by women in Nepal was said to be domestic violence. But there was insufficient analysis on the part of the CSO to support an intervention addressing the causes of gender-based violence. In most projects there is an understanding of women's needs and problems but gender relations between men and women and the ways in which they disadvantage women is not clearly articulated in project analysis. A caveat is perhaps the social mapping conducted in some communities which includes men and women and an understanding of the dynamics between them (e.g. COSAN, Nepal). There is also a lack of clarity on the opportunity cost of educating girls and how this impacts on decisions in the household regarding their access. However, there was a recurring theme of financial/monetary empowerment as necessary step for participating in household decision making for example for children's schooling (CADAM). Therefore, it appears that in some cases activities aimed at women's empowerment within some

CSCF projects are not based on an in-depth understanding of gender dynamics. However, a number of awareness raising activities are carried out to include women in project activities and facilitate their empowerment (e.g. quota system in VDEC committees – CADAM). While there is gender disaggregation it is not clear how this is used beyond saying how many women and men have benefited.

- **Gender-Based Violence:** Despite shortcomings in gender analysis projects visited in India and Nepal, there was remarkable openness in discussing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) – (e.g., how it was manifested in the community and its impact on individuals and the wider community). In Makwanpur (Nepal) for example a visit to one women's group was dominated by discussions around an ongoing case of domestic violence. For the project partner (COSAN) the

> **Elements of a strategy around GBV:**
> - Information provided on Domestic Violence Bill; defining what is meant by domestic violence.
> - Creating a social space for women to discuss issues in an open, protected environment; key to this is the use of social mobilisers.
> - Encouraging the reporting of domestic violence.
> - Provision of legal aid provided by COSAN.

strategy for combatting GBV was more implicit than explicit but there were clear elements nonetheless (see box).

Photograph: R. Burge

- **The need for economic empowerment:** Political empowerment of women could only have more meaning and success when their economic empowerment is also ensured - and men are willing to support it. This was clearly a concern of the projects in Nepal with one woman expressing: *"without economic empowerment, women will remain powerless"* (COSAN). Women expressed how they may feel socially empowered while remaining largely dependent upon their husbands to provide them with money to attend meetings, participate in a training etc. But it is also more than

just this – it is about women having their own independent means to earn a living and/or contribute to the household income.

- **Inclusion of disabled children and adults:** Social integration of people with Disabilities (PWDs) is at the heart of the project visited in India (Action Village India). Although mainstreaming of children with disabilities seems to be successful in terms of the schools' acceptance (after a long and well-crafted strategy by NBJK in India), it is unclear to what extent the educational needs of the disabled children are being met. This issue does not seem to be a priority in the project, although parents may expect some educational outcomes to ensure their children's future, and hence greater social inclusion of their children in society. Access to wheelchairs by children with mobility problems has certainly played a key role in their 'inclusion' to schools (as they are now able to go to schools by themselves), but also helped them in

socialising with other children in the villages, as is the case with the children of Jinet Khatun & Mohammed Hasim (Hazaribag district). Effective mainstreaming of PWDs within existing DFID programmes in Nepal was also raised as a concern at the Nepal workshop.

41. There is therefore a general **lack of social inclusion analysis** underpinning the CSCF projects we visited. This is despite the fact that all CSCF projects were asked at proposal stage to demonstrate how the project considered women and other marginalised groups. Discrimination on the basis of gender, caste, religion and disability can be deeply entrenched. Challenging discrimination is important to achieve long term impact.

> ➢ *Recommendation (for CSD/Fund Manager): Develop clear guidance for grantees to set out DFID's requirements for social analysis, including gender analysis.*
> ➢ *Recommendation (For CSD/Fund Manager): Request CSOs provide a contextual analysis on power dynamics as part of the theory of change, demonstrating how it underpins the project's results, i.e. why empowerment is needed, and how this will help better results for the disadvantaged; the opportunities, risks and potential for lasting results; and how the analysis is used throughout the project cycle (i.e. re-visited in annual and mid-term reports).*

4.4 Strategies to promote equity

42. A wide range of strategies were described by organisations in promoting equity and helping to break social barriers against disadvantaged groups. These included: demonstration events, use of multi-media, sharing success stories, inviting men and women onto common platforms, communicating with cultural symbols. The most effective of these strategies are::

- Use of local **role models** who can have influence on other members of the community such as medical practitioners, teachers and religious leaders. All the projects visited in India and Nepal use role models to raise awareness of communities and groups of their rights and entitlements. Role models are used to promote gender empowerment. Women role models inspire other women, helping them see beyond the household to take a more active role in public life (e.g. first female Dalit teacher used to demonstrate and encourage Dalit families to send their girls to school).
- **Inclusion:** There was a clear strategy in the COSAN (Nepal) project to involve all women in remote, poor communities to avoid creating divisions or conflict with the added objective of promoting community harmony. This could be said to be in part a legacy of the conflict.
- **Accessing and controlling resources** (including **gender budgeting**): Knowing what people are entitled to in local development plans was a key approach of some of the work in Nepal. This necessitated an engagement between the VDCs and local women's groups; firstly to seek information (the VDC budget),

secondly by demanding their share of the budget, and thirdly by participating in VDC meetings to make decisions.

- **Positive discrimination** through a quota system in committee composition. Although this in itself is not sufficient, it is an appropriate strategy and step to ensure the involvement / participation of women in the decision-making structures, as committees seem to be dominated by male members of organisations.

- **Creating a social space** for women within a male-dominated environment to discuss issues in an open, protected environment could come across as an obvious strategy, but it is fundamental to the long-term approach of projects concerned with equity. The first step is to get women to meet together, to discuss issues in their households, and then move towards issues concerned with the whole community. Key to this is the role of the social mobilisers.

- **Ensuring that the disabled are reached** – for example DHRC (Nepal) advocated on behalf of PWDs for a national disabled card to ensure that disabled people recognise their rights and are entitled to specific benefits (e.g. water provision). If disability is not mainstreamed or integrated into development projects DHRC's strategy is to lobby the project implementer at a local and institutional level, and advocate at the national commission. If all fails it resorts to legal pressure.

4.5 Being prepared to adapt

43. Empowerment is an ongoing process that needs to: adapt as people begin to voice what's important to them; as needs are met; as new requirements arise and people's aspirations evolve. Civil society is often uniquely placed to respond to this due to their access to, understanding of and relationships with communities. One Dalit rights project (CADAM) in India used education as their entry point, and their logframe was structured around this. However, they had integrated into their project work land and social rights based on the needs of the communities (although the logframe does not as yet capture these elements). The nature of project funding is that it is for a defined intervention and CSCF project management processes reflect this. At the same time there should be some scope to respond to changing realities on the ground.

   ➢ *Recommendation (for CSD): CSD should reflect on how to 'flexibly' fund empowerment to better respond to changes in the context. For example, consider introducing a 'contingency fund' within empowerment and accountability projects earmarked specifically for seizing upon immediate opportunities and addressing sudden risks.*

   ➢ *Recommendation (for CDS/Fund Manager): Consider how to have more regular engagement on log frames to ensure they remain a living document for planning and monitoring.*

   ➢ *Recommendation (for Fund Manager): Consider how to support grantees in using clearly defined (and locally relevant) milestones that demonstrate progress towards achieving their objectives, and vision.*

4.6 Achieving sustainability

44. Clearly defined exit strategies in the project design are crucial for projects to achieve sustainability. Successful CSOs tend to be those which have a clear plan to do themselves out of work. This can happen when the beneficiaries feel able to manage a process independent of the CSO or where groups claiming their rights start to pass on their skills to other groups or where service delivery is taken on by others such as government agencies or the private sector. The means of engagement in this process is crucial. Some CSOs decided they would only work with volunteers as this would be more sustainable if project funding were to end. Government officials stressed that the CSOs needed to work collaboratively with them to foster their relationship. Once a specific issue has been handed over, the CSO may do a new piece of work that will further help to meet their vision or they may withdraw altogether.

> ➢ ***Recommendation (for CSD):*** *Consider funding longer-term evaluation timeframes, including after the project has ended, to assess the sustainability aspects of empowerment interventions.*

45. A number of strategies to achieve sustainability were identified during the project visits and workshops:

- **Scaling up** project activities presented an opportunity for projects in Nepal which are meeting unmet needs but are only covering a limited number of people and localities due to availability of resources.
- **Integration into government programmes:** There is the potential for services delivered by CSOs to be taken on by government after the project ends, but there is also a concern about the ability / responsiveness of government services in some states / districts to take over initiatives (e.g. drugs treatment in Bihar (India) – Basic Needs).
- **Building social capital:** Projects can help to build platforms or coalitions where people have developed a common political or social agenda, such as for Dalits. People have seen the value of creating broad-based community institutions with strong local leadership and rooted within the community. Such platforms can address multiple issues and link with other networks. Many of the federations run by and representing PWDs, which have been set up by NBJK project are now operating largely independently of project support. For example, the Giridih federation drove through an initiative to set up camps to process free railway passes for PWDs and it manages that process now.
- **Building knowledge and skills** useful for initiating other projects or which could lead to engagement of individuals in other institutions or work.
- **Shifting the responsibility of engagement.** Some CSOs have moved from being project implementer to facilitator or adviser during the course of a project. For example, DHRC (Nepal) has empowered PWDs who are now engaging directly with decision-makers. Consequently DHRC's role is moving more towards providing legal advice.

- **Designing exit strategies at the outset.** Following the group feedback at the Nepal workshop some partner organisations recognised the need to build in exit strategies into their project design.

4.7 Added value of the UK CSO

46. The role of UK CSOs is not always clear**.** The CSCF grant is with a UK CSO who provides capacity building to in-country implementing partners. However, it was not always clear what value the UK CSO brought in terms of contextual analysis, supporting monitoring and evaluation and learning, and delivering on reporting of results and capturing evidence. However, there are notable examples of good partnerships where support has been provided on due diligence (e.g. in establishing a new partnership); lesson learning and best practice (e.g. in data collection and analysis).

   ➢ *Recommendation (for Fund Manager): UK CSOs should be required to outline in more specific terms their added value to a partnership in terms of analysis, capacity building, theory of change, M&E and Learning, value for money, and ensuring evidence-based results.*

4.8 Capacity Building

47. A number of strategies or approaches are being used to build capacities, such as:

   - **Learning by doing**: CSOs may encourage project beneficiaries to take the lead on activities themselves, learning from their own successes and failures. For example, mentoring and coaching is provided by social mobilisers in Nepal (LEADS and COSAN).

   > **An example of a good capacity building strategies by NBJK (India):** Capacity building strategies are a combination of information flow, clarity on processes / procedures / stakeholders / challenges, mobilisation, engaging the groups and individuals into a process of action, a carefully crafted handholding in which they help the beneficiaries do it themselves and do not do it for them. The capacity building is seldom a structured training.

   - Capacity building is a process in which the primary constituency (the beneficiaries) and all the stakeholders are **engaged on continuous process of bargaining and sharing information.** It is thus difficult to conclude that one actor (CSO or Government) has a monopoly over capacity. Information could flow in different directions, as government officials can build their skills and capacity as much as project staff or community groups in the process. This is happening with self-help groups (e.g. NBJK) where there is a flow of information between various institutions, project staff and government service providers. This is helping NBJK to build its own capacity and the self-help groups are enhancing the capacity of the service delivery institutions in terms of better networking and information sharing.

- Enabling communities **to navigate power relations:** to be able to know how to deal with duty bearers while claiming their rights (e.g. to have disability certificates in India; to demand budget allocations from VDCs in Nepal).
- Capacity building is also about building **cadres and/or leaders** at grassroots level and using them as role models. An example of this was clearly seen in one of the women's groups in Nepal where a young teacher appeared to be a focal point for the group, distilling information, knowledge and identifying opportunities for the group (COSAN).

4.9 Emerging results

48. CSOs recognised that measuring empowerment is a challenge as the results and impact of empowerment is not always tangible. Often CSOs rely on anecdotal evidence or listing activities carried out by empowered groups (e.g. local FM radio coverage of a women's group demanding electricity supplies, road improvements, forest protection in Nepal).

49. The projects we visited are at different stages, some have just completed the first couple of years while others are coming towards closure. The ways in which they record results relies heavily on narratives, for example: an individual's story, about how much the project has changed his or her life; a story of a particular group, how they have acted together to improve their livelihoods; the story of a community which has strengthened its voice to make a claim for their rights and entitlements.

> **Results of empowerment for those suffering from mental health:** For the first time, in western **Nepal**, 485 persons with mental illness are getting regular medical treatment; with a 75% improvement rate recorded; and 13 health posts are now engaged in mental health follow up clinics (LEADS, Basic Needs Nepal). Likewise, in Jharkand and Bihar states in **India**, so far 1,408 people with mental illness (PWMI) have started to access mental health services from 24 camps held. Early signs on health improvement is reported (NBJK, BN India).

50. A number of the projects with an empowerment agenda appear to **fill gaps in service delivery** which have not been addressed before, by either government or civil society, for example: identifying and meeting the needs of people with mental illnesses in western Nepal and in Jharkand and Bihar states in India. Such projects have provided clear evidence of impact on the individual as well as support and engagement of the local and district health authorities.

> **Results of empowerment in education:**
> In Makwanpur (Nepal) 440 children (253 girls, 187 boys) who had dropped out of school or not enrolled are now receiving supplementary classes; nearly 2,000 excluded women have come together in some 110 community action groups and are informed of their rights and are taking action in meetings with the Village Development Committees (VDCs) and successfully demanding what they are entitled from the VDC budget (e.g. road repairs, electricity, water points). (COSAN, Nepal).

51. There is evidence that empowerment activities in CSCF projects are leading to **real changes in the lives of people** who have been previously excluded or marginalised. For example, a women's empowerment project in southern Nepal (Makwanpur) has a productive engagement with local government services and structures with people being made aware of their rights and entitlements, and responsibilities. Collective action – including participation in government structures – has resulted in tangible benefits for individuals and communities (see left-hand box).

52. Some CSCF projects have been able to **combine service delivery with advocacy** whereby target communities have gained services (such as loans for livelihood activities) and benefited from being helped into self-help groups that can agitate to claim rights to access government services. For example: the process used by NBJK project has resulted in dynamic self-help groups able not only to claim their rights and access

> In Bihar and Jharkhand states in India, 4,161 people with disabilities obtained disability certificates, with 1,075 now receiving disability benefits. 234 have received aids such as wheelchairs from government schemes, and 388 children with disabilities are now going to school. The process for obtaining disability certificates has been made efficient (reduced time) and more accessible at block level instead of at district. The CSO together with the SHGs have influenced the bureaucracy at block and district level on a number of issues to prioritise the needs of people with disabilities in government schemes (e.g. rural housing quotas). (NBJK, India).

the benefits of The Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD Act) 1995, but also influence district and block level government institutions. The organisation has also started to work with a regional level disability movement to influence government policies and practice with aspirations of becoming self-sustained institutions in the future.

53. Within the portfolio of CSCF projects visited in Nepal and India, there is also evidence of projects adapting to **address emerging needs of the communities beyond what was originally planned**, and achieving this quite successfully. For example, CADAM project is working with disadvantaged communities (Dalit and Advisasis) helping them not only with their children's enrolment in primary schools, but also in supporting them to claim and access their social needs. The project through its successful working relationships with education

Photograph: J. Chambers

In Bundelkhand and Madhya Pradesh (India) the enrolment of Dalits and Adivasis in primary schools has improved considerably (almost 100% in the schools visited for both boys and girls). In addition, the attendance of children and teachers has also improved. The VDEC supported by the project has been instrumental in: the transfer of five school teachers who were considered as discriminatory; improved school meals and infrastructure (toilets, water hand pumps) as a result of advocacy pressure on district level education authorities and schools. scheme) have been comparatively increased in favour of Dalit and Adivasi families (CADAM, India).

authorities and schools, bas been asked to help with other government programmes (e.g. Save the Girl Campaign). The district education authorities see the role of CADAM as being key in helping them fulfil their objectives in reaching hard to reach communities.

4.10 Measuring results (M&E)

54. In terms of measuring results, CSCF **CSOs can play a useful role in defining locally relevant indicators**. For example, one project intervention in India resulted in Dalits no longer being willing to remove their shoes in higher caste villages. This then became a locally constructed indicator of empowerment. In western Nepal, success was seen as community members accepting mental illness as a treatable health problem rather than as a social problem where individuals were stigmatised and ostracised. This type of descriptive change poses a methodological challenge in relation to finding common indicators that can be aggregated across projects. A number of CSOs are trying to measure the impact of empowerment – and how this can be attributed to their work – through comparing progress against baseline data through social mapping exercises.

55. A number of CSCF CSOs used the transfer of ownership of the process to the beneficiaries and the level of support the groups needed as an indicator (with clear milestones) of empowerment. For the CSO when the communities say, 'We don't need you', that is success; but the process of arriving at this point is difficult to capture. Particular challenges are measuring the intrinsic value of empowerment and self-worth or measuring incremental, gradual changes within the life of a project.

56. A final challenge identified is how to communicate the need for capturing robust results from the donor down the chain to the community workers who have the information but perhaps not the resources nor the know-how to measure results.

57. Other key learning points on measuring results are: (a) working on empowerment does not naturally fit with a logframe approach if it is not used in a flexible way. Most organisations visited expressed how the logframe can never capture all aspects of the project as empowerment work is continuously evolving and changing, (b) qualitative aspects of change are more difficult to capture than quantitative aspects, (c) the report format is a restraining issue (not enough space); and there is an emphasis on capturing numbers and less on the qualitative aspects of change and impact, (d) lack of proper documentation at grassroots level (local activists who are delivering project results are not always strong in reporting) (e) lack of culture for structured learning and sharing of information, (f) field visits – capturing and tracking stories over time – are seen as the best way to assess change and progress, (g) field staff do not always make time for exchanges, learning and reporting.

> ➢ *Recommendation (for Fund Manager/CSCF grantees): Consider how to improve communication and capacity building for local partners to enable them to better capture hard-to-measure results.*
> ➢ *Recommendation (for CSD/Fund Manager): Explore how to collect and aggregate qualitative and quantitative findings to present an overall results story in thematic areas such as empowerment, equity and gender.*
> ➢ *Recommendation (For CSD): For other DFID funds (e.g. Global Poverty Action Fund) there needs to be clear guidance on how empowerment and accountability projects can demonstrate a line of sight to poverty reduction and their contribution to the Millennium Development Goals.*

5. CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS (BY STAKEHOLDER)

For Civil Society Department (CSD)

> ➢ *For future DFID funds, grantees should be required to explain how and why project funding will contribute to their organisation's vision (this can also be explained as a theory of change).*
> ➢ *Consider the scope for a higher risk appetite for empowerment projects where results might take longer to materialise or for projects working in fragile and conflict affected states or regions with a weak enabling environment.*
> ➢ *Consider how funders can move from imposing a 'conventional' or (western-centric) vision of development and progress towards more locally defined notions that are culturally relevant. Consider also the challenges faced in presenting locally defined notions of development progress into outcomes that can be measured, understood and valued by UK tax payers?*
> ➢ *CSD should reflect on how to 'flexibly' fund empowerment to better respond to changes in the context. For example, consider introducing a 'contingency fund' within empowerment and accountability projects earmarked*

specifically for seizing upon immediate opportunities and addressing sudden risks.

➤ *Consider funding longer-term evaluation timeframes, including after the project has ended, to assess the sustainability aspects of empowerment interventions.*

➤ *For other DFID funds (e.g. Global Poverty Action Fund) there needs to be clear guidance on how empowerment and accountability projects can demonstrate a line of sight to poverty reduction and their contribution to the Millennium Development Goals.*

For CSD and Fund Manager

➤ *Develop clear guidance for grantees to set out DFID's requirements for social analysis, including gender analysis.*

➤ *Request CSOs to provide a contextual analysis on power dynamics as part of the theory of change, demonstrating how it underpins the project's results, i.e. why empowerment is needed, and how this will help better results for the disadvantaged; the opportunities, risks and potential for lasting results; and how the analysis is used throughout the project cycle (i.e. re-visited in annual and mid-term reports).*

➤ *Consider how to have more regular engagement on log frames to ensure they remain a living document for planning and monitoring.*

➤ *Explore how to collect and aggregate qualitative and quantitative findings to present an overall results story in thematic areas such as empowerment, equity and gender.*

For Fund Manager and Grantees

➤ *Consider how to improve communication and capacity building for local partners to enable them to better capture hard-to-measure results.*

For Fund Manager only

➤ *Consider how to support grantees in using clearly defined (and locally relevant) milestones that demonstrate progress towards achieving their objectives, and vision.*

➤ *UK CSOs should be required to outline in more specific terms their added value to a partnership in terms of analysis, capacity building, theory of change, M&E and Learning, value for money, and ensuring evidence-based results.*