Understanding women’s empowerment:
The interplay between personal and relational empowerment

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Throughout history and across nations still today, men on average are superior to women in terms of power.1 Especially in developing nations patriarchy and gender inequality are still prevalent.2 Empowering women is seen as an important step to accelerate economic development3,4 and as one of the central issues in the process of sustainable development for many nations worldwide5,6. This research defines women’s empowerment and investigates the relation between different dimensions.

Women’s empowerment

“The expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437)6

Women’s empowerment entails a process from being un-empowered to becoming empowered7

The Three-Dimensional Women’s Empowerment Model proposes that women’s empowerment can be differentiated at three distinct dimensions:

- the micro-level: personal empowerment
  - individuals’ personal beliefs and actions
- the meso-level: relational empowerment
  - beliefs and actions in relation to relevant others
- the macro-level: societal empowerment
  - outcomes in the broader societal context

Personal & Relational empowerment

Economic development alone cannot result in the development of women’s empowerment.3,4 To achieve change towards more equality, both parties of the relationship need to be involved.3

The pathways through which the process of women’s empowerment occurs it shaped by specific contexts8 and strongly influenced by laws, social norms and cultural practices.9 People in collectivistic societies give meaning to their identity through relationships with others.10,11

References:

Conclusion

• To understand women’s empowerment it is important to differentiate between personal, relational, and societal dimensions.
• Relational dynamics are crucial in the development of women’s empowerment.