Empowerment of women- a strategic tool in rural development

Case study at the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women, Madhya Pradesh, India

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The context of the problem
In India, as in many other countries, there has been a growing urbanization during the last decades. A number of reports presented within the frameworks of studies relating to the urbanization process in India highlight the impoverishment of rural areas as a result of the increased migration to cities\(^1\). The development process of the countryside is left in stagnation when Indians with higher education often move to larger cities. Despite the fact that the country has undergone a very strong economic and technological development in recent decades, social development which particularly affects women has not occurred at the same pace.\(^2\) In India, the situation of women is a very vulnerable one. However, there are agents that recognize women as actors that have a great impact on society and development.

This thesis will focus on women’s role and importance in the local community by evaluating the work of the *Barli Development Institute for Rural Women* in empowering rural and tribal women in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India.

1.2 Purpose of the study
The aim of the study is to analyze how investments in women’s education affect community development and women empowerment in a rural area. The study will be conducted through interviews and the observation of women involved within the work of the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women.

Issues related to the purpose are;

What outcomes have the received training had in daily life for the women involved within the training in terms of resources, agency and achievements?

How do the respondents perceive that women’s role and position in their home villages have been affected by the training?

Does the education lead to an increased ability for the women to make strategic live choices?

1.3 Delimitation
*The Barli Development Institute for Rural Women* has given more than 4500 tribal and rural women training during a period of 25 years. The broad curriculum of the training has been developed gradually and extension centers have opened over the years for women who are unable to come to the Institute in Indore for training. The institute has also trained married couples in issues regarding gender equality. Moreover, the institute has trained women coming from other states than Madhya Pradesh. Given the wide range of the institute’s activities, this study cannot offer a comprehensive image of *the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women’s* work. It is delimited to study the institute’s effort in empowering illiterate and partially literate

\(^1\) Datta, Pranati,(2006) *Urbanization in India*, Indian Statistical Institute, 
\(^2\) R. B. Bhagat *Urbanisation in India: A demographic Reappraisal*, Maharshi Dayanand University.

women as community volunteers in Indore. Furthermore, the area of investigation is limited to
the state of Madhya Pradesh since this was the state all women involved in the training were
coming from during the time this field study was conducted. Limitations and complexities
regarding the methodology and findings of the study will be discussed throughout the thesis.

1.4 Methodology
This thesis is based on a field study conducted at the Barli Development Institute for Rural
Women in Indore, India. A combination of participant observation and semi-structured
interviews was used in order to gain knowledge of the women involved in the training given at
the institute.

Living at the institute for eight weeks gave me the opportunity to interact with the women
undergoing training. It also gave me the opportunity to have daily contact with the Director and
other staff at the institute. The combination of interviewing and participant observation was
effective since these two methods complemented each other during the field study. I was able to
test and verify observations that I had made during interview sessions. Furthermore, the
interviews were necessary in order to get a comprehensive picture of the people under study.

Participant observation
A participant observation is a commonly used method in qualitative studies. It refers to studies
where the researcher, through observations, gain information about a group of people in their
own natural milieu. This type of method provides the opportunity to obtain knowledge of the
social behavior that occurs within a certain setting. There are diverse ways of doing an
observation depending on the extent that the researcher chooses to participate with the group of
people studied. In addition to, how the researcher chooses to analyze the observations. I made
semi-observations since I was an obvious outsider from the group under study. I never shadowed
the reason for why I was staying at the institute. I was an active observer in the sense that I
decided to participate and not only observe the women in their various activities. I was able to
participate and note actions, which gave knowledge and information about the institute's work.
Friendly conversations or informal interviews with staff, women undergoing training, and some
of their relatives were made during the fieldwork. The findings of the participant observation
will be illustrated by pictures, informal interview answers and as a part of the analytical
framework within the analysis.

Semi- Structured Interviews
A semi-structured interview refers to a situation where the researcher structures an interview by
having prepared a set of questions, an interview guide, which is thematically constructed. The
questions are often formulated in an open manner and the researcher has the opportunity to pose
further questions with regards to the respondent’s answers. Semi-structured interviews has the
advantage that it offers information about the interviewees own reflections, whilst at the same
time it also present comparable answers. 20 semi-structured interviews were made during the
field study. The interviews lasted between ten minutes and one hour and all of them, except for

4 Ibid. p. 127.
one, were recorded. The sample group was partially selected by staff at the Institute, partially by me. I selected respondents that seemed to feel more comfortable than others with interacting with me.

Methodological concern
Qualitative methodologies
Qualitative methodologies enable research that give understanding of practices and processes that works beyond the things we can experience through our senses. Rather than being numerical and extensive, qualitative methodologies characterize themselves as intensive and deep. Qualitative methodologies are commonly dismissed for its characteristics of being subjective, difficult to generalize and hard to replicate. However, these features are not applicable for all studies and methodological choice needs to connect to the context of the investigated problem.

Using qualitative methodologies affects your understanding of social reality and how you consider knowledge being produced. This approach is based on the assumption that most knowledge is subjective, thus partial and situated. It assumes that personal characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity and level of education influence our values and our understandings of the world. Furthermore, it is suggested that these attributes also influence how other people experience us. Qualitative methods recognize the world as a product of different performances, representations and constructions. The emphasis is to reflect upon, understand and interpret people’s experiences and surrounds by recognizing the world as something continuously being reconstructed through political, social, cultural and economic processes.

Cross-cultural research
It is important to bear in mind the complexities that can arise while conducting cross-cultural research. It is essential to reflect upon the asymmetrical power relations and differences that might exist between the researcher and the people involved within the study. As a cross-cultural researcher it is crucial to keep in mind the fact that you don’t belong within the culture you are about to study. This in turn will affect the results of the investigation. It is important to reflect upon your own positionality and how it connects to the culture and context you are studying. Moreover, considerations regarding moral and ethics have to be made. It was crucial to reflect upon how my study and behavior would affect the people involved in the investigation during the fieldwork. Methods that might have led to anxiety or harm the people involved within the study had to be dismissed.

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5 Limb, Melanie, Dwyer, Claire (2001), Qualitative methodologies for geographers. Issues and debates. London: Oxford University Press.6
8 Ibid. p. 89.
9 Ibid. p.8.
10 Ibid. p.6.
11 Ibid.p.89,94.
I am a European, middleclass, urban woman who comes from a very different human geography
than the one under study. The cultural and socioeconomic differences between me and the
women under study were always noticeable. I was constantly confronted with the
insider/outsider boundary which makes up a border that distinguishes those who belong from
those who doesn’t within an area. It separates the insiders from the outsiders and hence,
involves issues of inclusion and exclusion. Living at the Barli Development Institute for Rural
Women during eight weeks did not make it possible for me to bypass this invisible border and
acknowledge myself as an insider.

It is likely that I am the only or one of a few foreigners that the women under study have
met and had a conversation with. Most respondents had never been interviewed before. With
regards to the respondents’ stories about their livelihoods in their home villages, it is likely that
they weren’t familiar with someone asking them for their views and reflections. Moreover, a
large number of the respondents were mere children, although how many of them who was under
the age of eighteen remain unknown since a large number weren’t aware of their age. Hence, a
situation with an unequal power relationship between me and the women under study was easily
arisen. The hierarchical relationship was gradually lowered although never completely reduced
during the fieldwork. Despite the cultural, socioeconomic and linguistic barriers were many
women keen to make contact with me and gradually allowed me access into their social worlds.

Interviewing can be an efficient way to gather valuable information although it requires a
well-functioning cooperation between the interviewer and interviewee. Moreover, it is important
to keep in mind that knowledge between the interviewer and respondent is socially constructed
in their relationship. I chose to interview women that seemed more comfortable than others
talking with me and the format of semi-structured interviews was chosen so that the interviewee
was able to modify its structure and decide which topics felt particularly relevant to talk about.
To choose respondents that seemed willing to be interviewed and to let their own reflections
stand in the forefront lowered the risk that the person would feel uneasy during the interview
session. These strategies may have led to biased results. However, these considerations was
nothing but ethical. Moreover, I believe that the use of semi-structured interviews lowered the
risk that my westerner worldview would influence them and hence reduce the study’s validity. I
was hoping that the interview format chosen might lower the interviewer effect, thus making the
study more reliable.

Due to the linguistic gap between me and the participating women I was dependent on
translation during interviews. There are always shortcomings with gathering information
through linguistic barriers. Valuable information risk passing by and incorrect translated
questions and answers can easily cause misleading representations. However, I felt that my
interpreters and I had a well functioning collaboration and that they were very careful in their
translations. Furthermore, I believe that their presence; being young Indian women themselves,
made the interview sessions more comfortable for the interviewees and thus more informative
and beneficial for the study.

13 Limb, Melanie, Dwyer, Claire (2001), Qualitative methodologies for geographers. Issues and debates.
14 Kvale, Steinar (1996), Interviews an Introduction to qualitative research interviewing, London: Sage
Publications p. 127.
To conduct cross cultural research is complicated since it is difficult to fully understand the context that is studied. Being an outsider poses a range of challenges since some information automatically passes by. However, it can also be used as an advantage. Being able to study something from an outsider’s perspective may grow new viewpoints and insights that an insider may not notice and reflect upon. I believe that despite the well known challenges that may arise in the context of cross cultural studies; my presence opened the possibility to conduct a fruitful investigation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The geography of gender
The French philosopher and feminist Simone De Beauvoir argued in her widely known piece of work The Second Sex that “one is not born a woman but rather becomes one”. De Beauvoir along with many others has challenged the idea that femininity, a social sex, is naturally imposed on women genetically. Gender theory distinguishes sex from gender and understands the latter as a social construction. It recognize gender as a product of social norms and expectations, ideas and ideals of what it means to be woman or a man that prevail in society which thus, form women and men’s social identities. Responsibilities distributed between men and women are reflecting prevailing norms that occur in the culture in which they live, separates them in to two different categories, which consequently influence their role and position in society.

Feminist scholars have demonstrated that gender divisions are constructed through binary assumptions. Whereas women’s characteristics are often portrayed as emotional, irrational, private and dependant, men are defined as the opposite; being scientific, independent, cultured and public. In western counties, this is reflected by the fact that women to a greater extent are involved in work within the society’s reproductive sphere leaving men dominating the productive. Furthermore, feminist scholars have demonstrated that attributes considered as feminine are regarded as less valuable than those attributed to men. Unfortunately, a disproportional amount of research considering gender has been conducted by western scholars regarding western societies. However, anthropological studies have demonstrated that a division of labour between men and women doesn’t have a homogeneous appearance but exist within all cultures in the world. Geographically, gender relations differ since social norms of what is

17 Ibid. p.13, 14.
proper behavior for men and women diverge through space and time. Gender roles are context dependant and can be seen as an outcome of cultural, environmental economical and political intersections. Gender orders prevail within all spheres of society.

The gender norms are often destructive since they limit or in the worst scenarios inhibit men and women from living the life they wish to live. The debate on gender is interlinked with that regarding gender equality. The gender relations create patriarchies; asymmetrical power structures were women are the stakeholders of the least power. Women’s situation around the world varies greatly. However, it is an acknowledged fact that women as a group compared to men as a group have lesser opportunities. Women have in general less control over assets of wealth than men do. According to the United Nations, UN, 70 percent of the world poorest people are women. In many societies, women have restricted access to education and in all societies women earn less money than men do for equal work. The average global wage gap in 2008 was according to the United Nations 17 percent.

Plenty of women are confronted with a subordinate status within their household and community. For example, under some legal systems, women are in fact denied the same rights as men. Additionally, women often carry the responsibility for unpaid work performed at home and are disadvantaged in formal labour markets. Women are frequently being confronted with violence and discrimination. In a developing country like India, there are several factors as caste systems, religion, society’s influences and traditions that shape the life pattern of women and contribute to their often marginal position in society.

26 The term patriarchy was coined by Kate Millet and literally means the law of the father.
29 http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/, UN, 11-05-12
31 http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/, UN, 11-05-12
2.2 Empowerment of women as a strategic tool in rural development

The notion of empowerment refers to a process in which people that previously have been denied control over their lives gain greater freedom and agency in decision making. Empowerment is often said to consist of three components; resource, agency and achievements. Access to resource such as education, information and income are seen as factors that trigger an empowering process. A greater agency refers to the ability to make strategic life choices. This could for example be the opportunity for a woman to choose whether or not to be married or have children. Achievements are recognized as the change in well-being that one experience as an outcome of the greater access to resources and the growing agency.

Empowerment of women aims to give women, who previously have been denied authority to make decisions concerning their own life, the ability to make those choices. Women empowerment aims to promote a growing sense of personal worth, control over resource, independence, access to markets, power in decision making and security among women. Anderson and Eswaran have highlighted the distinction between a woman’s access to resources and her ability to control them in their article “What determines female autonomy? Evidence from Bangladesh”. They recognize that it is foremost the second which makes an indication of empowerment. It has been shown that in order for women to gain a greater bargain power within the household, income needs to be under women’s control and not only generated by them.

Moreover, women empowerment can be said to take place when a woman enhance her own well being by challenging social norms and practices that works within the culture in which she lives. Investments in capacity building among women have increased during the last years in many developing countries. Development programs intending to improve rural livelihoods normally targeted men in the early eighties. However, during the latter part of the same decade these projects became increasingly focused towards women. The United Nations and the World Bank have highlighted the importance of empowering women, especially the poor that live in rural areas. One of the eight Millennium Development Goals is promotion of gender equality. The World Bank has recommended that women empowerment should be a key

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Empowering women is considered essential not only for their personal wellbeing and welfare at the household level. Women are often considered to be the members of society who pass on social norms and modify the quality and quantity of a country’s future generations. Thus, investments in women are seen as strategies that can generate well-being of entire societies.

Women have come to be considered as key factors of sustainable development. Empowerment of women has become a strategic tool to defeat poverty and experience has shown that it leads to improving life conditions within households and communities. Studies have demonstrated the links between economic growth, greater educational skills among youths, poverty reduction and empowerment of women.

In India the economic growth which in turn has led to poverty reduction between the years 1990-2005 was most evident in states where a high percentage of women participated in the labour force. Non-governmental organizations have had an important role in empowering women. The strategies within programs that target women and seek to empower them range. Some projects work to reduce poverty among women along with their dependants, some aims to stimulate capacity building among women as a vulnerable social group, other’s seek to initiate a growing efficiency of women’s labour and time.

The empowerment of women seeks to advance women’s role and position in society at several scales; in the family and household, in the community and at a national or global level. In addition, women’s empowerment covers several spheres in society. It is difficult to determine which factors that leads to women empowerment and to measure it since the notion is so multi-faceted. A greater access to economical resources is often considered as the most important factor in the process of women gaining power. This involves a greater access to education,

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40 Femida Handi, Meenaz Kassam (2004), *Women’s Empowerment in Rural India*, Paper presented as the ISTR conference, Toronto Canada July 2004, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University p.3.
formal labour markets and land and property rights. A number of microfinance programs that seek and to empower women economically has emerged. Women’s involvement in the political sphere is another important indicator of women empowerment. Behavioral changes and growing self confidence are other aspects of the concept. In their article “Evidence of women’s empowerment in India: a study of socio-spatial disparities”, Gupta and Yesudian state that studies have found that a growing self confidence is important in the process of gaining power over one’s life, not only due to the increased sense of well being it lead to but also since it helps overcoming external barriers. Moreover, studies have shown a connection between improvements in women’s empowerment and their access to higher education. Jain argues in his article “ICT’s and women’s empowerment; some case studies from India” that information communication technology, ICT can work as an ultimate channel towards empowerment.

However, some initiatives that aim to enhance women’s welfare have been criticized for doing the opposite and rather promote prevailing norms that works against women than challenge them. Experiences from Bangladesh have shown that credit that has specifically been provided for women’s investments might end up being under the control of the man in the household. Moreover, microcredit interventions have proven to sometimes leave women ending up in debt and despair rather than increase their wellbeing. Bali Swain argues that activities that aim to increase women’s efficiency in the household don’t necessarily lead to an improved status among women since it falls very well into the already existing gender norms that prevail in South Asia. Hence, Swain argues that activities that might increase women’s wellbeing do not necessarily lead to their empowerment.

The gender mainstreaming efforts give mixed outcomes since they aim to challenge deep-rooted discriminatory practices and patriarchal gender norms that prevail within society. Thus it is clear that gender mainstreaming efforts implemented so far has not always led to the desired outcome.

51 Suman, Jain, ICT’s and women empowerment, Department of Economics at LakshmiBai College, Delhi University
3. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY AREA

3.1 India

India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru once said that India is “a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads”.  

This quote has proven itself to ring true. The socioeconomic and spatial disparities within the country are easily recognized. India is the world’s biggest democracy with elections held every fifth year and it has got a comprehensive civil society. The country has undergone a strong economic and technological development during the last decade. In addition, according to national laws it is every Indian citizen’s right to have access to basic healthcare and education.

However, a large proportion of the population does not receive these services. A quarter of the world’s poorest people are living in India and two thirds of the county’s population lives on less than two US-dollars a day. Human immunodeficiency virus, HIV is widespread in India. Although the economic development has been strong and visible in urban India, poverty is still widespread and especially so in the rural areas. A large proportion of Indian citizens with a higher education relocate to cities, leaving the developmental process of the countryside in stagnation.

The situation of women in India is a difficult one. The number of women who participate in the formal labour sector has increased during the last two decades. Still, more than 90 percent of the women in the country are estimated to work in the informal labour market. A range of economic, social and cultural barriers makes it difficult for Indian women to gain waged employment. Limited access to education is one of many examples of discrimination against female children which in turn makes female illiteracy common in India. Indian women have in general a lack of mobility and their access to credit and technology is often poor.

Furthermore, Indian women’s ownership of land is limited and it is cultural taboo for women to interact with men outside the unit of the family. In addition, women in India are often not involved in decision making. Within the family, decisions are normally taken by a

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58 Suman, Jain, *ICT’s and women’ empowerment*,Department of Economics at LakshmiBai College, Delhi University, P. 3.
59 Fiona Leach and Shashikala Sitaram (2002), *Microfinance and women’s empowerment: a lesson from India*, Development in Practice, Volume 12, Number 5, p.577.
61 Fiona Leach and Shashikala Sitaram (2002), *Microfinance and women’s empowerment: a lesson from India*, Development in Practice, Volume 12, Number 5, p.577.
3.2 Madhya Pradesh

The state of Madhya Pradesh is located in central India and is one of country’s largest states by area. A population that is estimated to 39,6 million people, makes Madhya Pradesh one of the most populous states. The larger part of the state’s inhabitants are Hindu and lives within the rural regions. There are 52,086 villages within the state. However, the urban population is growing and the rapid urbanization is expected to continue. Agriculture is the principal sector and income for the population in Madhya Pradesh. The service sector has grown slowly during the last years whereas the agricultural sector has stagnated and investments in the industry sector are few.

The income level per capita in Madhya Pradesh is considerably lower than the Indian average. 37.4 percent of the population was estimated to live underneath the poverty line between the years 1999-2000. The tribal districts within Madhya Pradesh are considered to be amongst the most socially and economically disadvantaged areas in the country. Most tribes are to be found in the district Jhabua and the larger part is engaged within the agricultural sector.

These districts suffer from deforestation, poor soil, low harvest yields, undernourishment and a lack of safe drinking water. Furthermore, droughts and unsafe land tenure contribute to the

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66 Ibid. 11-05-16 p.70.
69 Ibid. 11-05-16 p. 133.
70 Ibid. 11-05-16 p.134.
difficult living conditions. A range of structural, economic, institutional and social barriers constrains the rural and poor inhabitants of the state to improve their conditions and livelihoods.

The state of health in Madhya Pradesh is poor and the life expectancy of the state’s population is among the lowest in India. Women die at a younger age than men do, reflecting their difficult living conditions. The life expectancy from birth in Madhya Pradesh was during the period 2001-2006 59 years among men and 58 years among women which is four respectively eight years below the national averages.

Access to health services is mostly limited in the rural areas where doctors generally are reluctant to serve. Moreover, the sanitary condition within the state, and especially within rural areas, is poor. A study from 2001 demonstrated that only 68 percent of the total number of households, and 62 percent of the rural households in Madhya Pradesh have access to clean drinking water. The tribal’s of Madhya Pradesh are worst affected by undernourishment. Within the tribal and rural areas, dangerous myths regarding health are common and many tribes seek treatment from traditional healers instead of medical physicians. Alcohol abuse is widespread within these areas.

The percentage of child mortality is very high in the state of Madhya Pradesh. In the year of 2004, the Infant Mortality Rate was the highest of all states in India and the death rates was higher for girls compared to boys. The gap between the genders seems to increase and this trend reveals discrimination since biologically; female babies are healthier than male ones.

The access to birth care in the state is the poorest in the country. Physical and psychological abuse of women occurs frequently in the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh even though the government has taken action to combat the problems. Since the victim’s often have inadequate knowledge of their juridical rights, and due to corruption and sexism, the offenses are hardly ever being reported. The quality of the teaching and the educational results in Madhya Pradesh has not been acknowledged as being of a high quality. Most children in the state go to

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73 Palta, Janak (2004) Sustainable Community Development through training of rural and tribal women as human resources, Ph D thesis, Bahai Chair for Studies in Development p.79.
77 Ibid. p. 131. 11-05-15.
81 Ibid. 11-05-15.
84 National University of Educational Planning and Administration, (2009) Seminar on access to elementary education in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarg, Seminar report, p. 3.
primary school but only 65 percent of the youths in Madhya Pradesh complete schooling of eight years.\textsuperscript{85}

Girls do not receive that same length of education as boys do. Within the tribal areas, approximately one half of the men and one fourth of the women have received formal education, which leaves the level of illiteracy high.\textsuperscript{86} The access to governmental services like education and healthcare are generally worst in the tribal districts of Madhya Pradesh\textsuperscript{87}.

\textit{The map illustrates Madhya Pradesh and the districts within the state. The map is taken from Education info India}\textsuperscript{88}

\section*{4. THE BARLI DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE FOR RURAL WOMEN}

\textit{The Barli Development Institute for Rural Women} was founded in 1985 and is located in Indore, the largest city in the state of Madhya Pradesh. The Institute is a successful non-governmental organization (NGO) that seek to initiate a economic and social developmental process within the tribal districts of Madhya Pradesh by empowering young tribal and rural women through holistic


training. Most course participants comes from western Madhya Pradesh and districts such as Khargone, Jhabua, Dhar and Dewas.\textsuperscript{89} The institute is certain that women from these areas are more able of bringing change and development within their communities than are men.\textsuperscript{90} The institute is a Bahá’í faith inspired NGO.\textsuperscript{91} The religion underlines the importance of service, unity and harmony between all human beings. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of holistic education and gender equality.\textsuperscript{92}

The training program is designed to increase the course participating women’s capability to bring social as well as economic change at a grassroots level within their home villages.\textsuperscript{93} The training given at the institute aims to educate the women and expand their understanding in health issues. It seeks to provide the women with skills that can generate an income and to teach them about environmental issues.

Furthermore, it aims to support the trainees mentally, teach them about the worth of gender equality and supply them with a growing self confidence. The institute especially seeks to educate the women who are socioeconomically underprivileged as members of scheduled tribes and scheduled casts. The training is aimed for women that haven’t gone through any schooling in their home villages or those who have left school at a lower age.\textsuperscript{94}

The institute seeks to work towards a sustainable community development within the women’s home villages which it considers to consist of social, economical, environmental and spiritual development. \textit{The Barli Development Institute for Rural Women} has trained more than 4500 tribal and rural women during a period of 25 years.\textsuperscript{95}

\section*{4.1 Aims and Objectives}

The institute targets women since they, according to the institute, constitute the primary foundation of society. The whole society becomes empowered by their empowerment since it is foremost the skills, knowledge and morals of the mother that is being passed on to the children. The assumption is that to reach gender equality; it is crucial for women to regard themselves as equivalent to men.\textsuperscript{96} The poor conditions that prevail within the state of Madhya Pradesh are according to the institute caused by the traditional attitudes and long-established practices that prevail in the communities.\textsuperscript{97} The main objectives of the Institute are the following:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{89}Palta McGilligan, Janak (2004) \textit{Sustainable Community Development through training of rural and tribal women as human resources}, Ph D thesis Bahaí Chair for Studies in Development p 2.
\item \textsuperscript{90}Ibid. p. 84.
\item \textsuperscript{91}Ibid. p 5.
\item \textsuperscript{92}For details on the Bahá’í Faith refer to: http://www.bahai.org.
\item \textsuperscript{93}http://www.barli.org/training-programmes.html , Barli Development Institute for Rural Women, 11-05-18.
\item \textsuperscript{95}Powerpoint presentation on the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women http://www.barli.org/downloadable_information.html, 2011-05-28
\item \textsuperscript{96}Palta McGilligan, Janak (2004),\textit{Sustainable Community Development through training of rural and tribal women as human resources}, Ph D thesis Bahaí Chair for Studies in Development,p.12.
\item \textsuperscript{97}Ibid. p.7.
\end{itemize}
• “To facilitate change in traditional attitudes and practices which block or impede the efforts of men and women to live in equality and feel secure.
• To facilitate the initiation and execution of development activities in the communities.
• To increase awareness and knowledge of their potential for improving the social and economic conditions in communities.
• To impart skills needed to initiate development activities, improve the health and nutritional situation, raise household income, increase literacy and protect and improve environment.”

4.2 Training programs
The institute holds two different training programs that is free of charge and lasts for six months. The main training program seek to train illiterate or partially illiterate course participants to become Community Volunteers, the second educates women who either have completed or interrupted their high school studies as Grassroot Trainers. The institute has designed the training program so that it suits the cultural heritage that is familiar to the trainees.

A broad curriculum has been developed by the institute, and it builds capacity among the trainees in literacy, individual development as well as it provides vocational and environmental skills. The women are being taught trough a holistic, integrated approach. The literacy training teaches the participating women Hindi and how to read uncomplicated, simpler texts. Furthermore, the women receive basic mathematical knowledge during training and they are taught how to keep track of time and measure lengths and weights. According to the Director of the institute, the literacy training provides the women with tools to understand themselves and the world in which they live.

The training within health and hygiene aims to teach the course participants how to recognize different health problems and how they can be prevented and cured. It involves among many things information regarding childcare, birth care, sanitation and nourishment. Furthermore, it aims to battle the dangerous superstitions regarding health that contribute to the poor physical condition within the tribal districts of Madhya Pradesh. It provides knowledge of how to keep healthy and inform about the dangerous effects that alcohol as well as other intoxicants might have.

The vocational training intends to empower the course participants with skills that can generate an income. The trainees are taught how to stitch and tailor. Moreover, they are taught how to use a sewing machine. The course participating women also learn how to grow their own

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99 Ibid. p.9.
100 Ibid. p.31.
103 Ibid.
vegetables and market them. Increased environmental awareness makes an important part of the Institute’s curriculum. The Barli Development Institute for Rural Women is known for its environmental contributions and its usage of renewable energy. The trainees acquire knowledge in environmental problems that prevail in their home communities such as degradation of forest and soil. The course participating women receive knowledge in how to recycle and about sustainable land maintenance. The women learn how to cook food with solar energy and are being encouraged to keep using solar energy in their home villages. The training given at the institute also seeks to provide the women with a grown self-esteem. It aims to teach and encourage the course participants to speak in front of others, to stand up for themselves and their rights and make independent decisions.

The training aims to combat intolerance between different casts and encourage the women to become agents of change. Moreover, the institute aims to inform their course participants about the value of gender equality and that discrimination against women aren’t just.

5. FIELD STUDY AT THE BARLI DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE FOR RURAL WOMEN

5.1 Profile of the trainees
According to the institute’s files, 92 women were training as Community Volunteers at the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women during the time the study was conducted. All course participating women came from villages located in Madhya Pradesh except for one woman who was living in a slum within the state. The women came from villages in districts such as Khargone, Alirajpur, Burhanpur, Dhar, Badwani, Betul and Indore. An exact estimation of the women’s age is not possible to comprehend since a large number of them did not know their age. However, the majority seemed to be between fifteen and twenty years old. All trainees, except for two were unmarried and only one had children.

Most of the women had come to know about the institute through a previous trainee in their home villages. Many of the girls had never reached the doorstep of school or had dropped out at a low standard in their home communities. This, however, was hardly never a matter of own choice. The reason for not attending school was mostly due to work, either within the household or at fields. Plenty of girls had quit their studies in order to work with household chores so that their other siblings could attend school. Another reason for not having received any formal education was that the parents never had sent their daughters to school.

Principals and teachers had in some cases refused to let the women continue their schooling due to misunderstandings, temporarily difficulties with participating in lectures or because of inadequate results. Most women arrived to the Institute illiterate and without the ability to name all days in the week or answer a basic mathematical question. The majority of

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106 Palta McGilligan, Janak (2004) Sustainable Community Development through training of rural and tribal women as human resources, Baha'i Chair for Studies in Development p.133.
107 Ibid. p.104, 128.
108 Ibid. p.130.
them were not able to tell the time from a watch and only one of 92 knew the mode of transmission of HIV.109

5.2 Interviews and Observations
The interview sessions gave knowledge of the women’s objectives for taking training and what impacts they hoped that the training might have on their lives. Furthermore, the interviews revealed the women’s own experiences of the outcomes of the Institutes work in their home communities.

My participant observation at the Barli institute enabled me to observe the course participating women during eight weeks. I participated in their daily chores, during meals and some of their lectures. Mostly, we interacted during activities after their classes.

Incentives for taking training and outcomes
The reason for wanting to get training was foremost to acquire vocational skills; to learn tailoring and stitching. The vocational training at the Institute was a means to acquire income generating skills. Respondents that never had received formal education or had dropped school at a low level expressed their happiness of getting to know how to read and write. They regarded the training as their chance to get educated. One respondent explained that she had faced difficulties with getting her parents’ permission to come to the Institute for training. Her other siblings had gone to school whereas she hadn’t.

The parents eventually agreed to send her after she had stressed that the training was her only chance to get educated. Another respondent explained that her main reason for coming to the Institute was to learn tailoring and also resume her studies after a two and a half year gap. She said that she had been unable to continue with her studies after seventh grade since school was located far away from her home and that she had to cross a river to get to it. When her friends left school she decided to drop too since the school way was rather dangerous.

When being asked, the respondents replied that they had noticed great changes in themselves compared to before having training. One of the interviewees described the changes by saying that she did not know how to use a sewing machine during the time of admission at Barli, about three months earlier. When the interview was held; she did not only have the skills to use one but were also aware of how to spell “sewing machine”. One of the respondents generalized the changes within the trainees after coming to the Institute in plain words. ‘When the girls are at home they do whatever their parents tell them to do’, she explained. ‘If they tell them to do household work they do that, they just don’t know what to do on their own. After coming to the Institute, they get a direction and understand what they really want to do’.

The same respondent stressed that the training has made her feel much more confident. She explained that she used to feel very scared and shy before taking training at the Institute. She didn’t feel comfortable with going out to the market. She used to say no when her family asked her to fetch water. The crowdedness and surroundings made her feel too uncomfortable. She had decided to drop out of school since the school walk had frightened her so much. When first starting training, she was afraid of going to the Institute’s office by herself. However, to interact with many other girls during training made her feel more confident and she explained that the

109 The Barli Development Institute for Rural Women, J00:th Evaluation form.
fright eventually has been disappeared. Fright of leaving the family house within the home village was frequently brought up during interviews.

One respondent explained how she imagined that the training would affect her life once completed. She said that she planned to bring her books from the Institute to the village, keep reading them and continue with her studies. She planned to do tailoring at home after returning and perhaps open a shop if people liked her stitched clothes. She said that she had learnt essential knowledge about cleanliness at the Institute such as how to keep the household and surroundings clean, the importance of washing hands before eating and taking a bath in the morning. She explained that many people from her village lacked this information and that she, once she would go back, wanted to tell other villagers about this.

Another respondent explained the social norms regarding marriage in her home village during an interview session. She said that the girls did not have any say about the choice of life partner in her home community; it was arranged by the parents. She mentioned that her parents had started to discuss an arrangement for her marriage. She made it very clear that she wouldn’t accept her parents marrying her with an alcohol consuming man and that she had made up her mind about this during the training at Barli.

The only respondent who was married shared her troublesome relation with her in-laws during an interview session. The woman had been living with her in-laws before taking training where she had been working with the household chores and at the fields. It required hard labour. After a couple of months she had fallen sick and her illness was eventually so severe that it made her unable to work. Her in-laws had told her that she was useless to them at that time; being uneducated and unable to work. She had to leave the in-laws home and move to her parents in order to get medical treatment and recover.

She explained how hurt she felt by the in-laws behavior during the interview session. After having recovered, she was encouraged by a villager to take training at the Institute. As a result of

The picture on the left demonstrates two trainees doing tailoring whereas the middle one shows trainees working in the garden. The Barli Institute raises the women’s environmental awareness during training. The picture on the right illustrates three trainees making energy briquettes by recycling used paper. The photographs belong to the author.
starting training; her in-laws expressed a will to take her back to the family household again. The respondent had decided to go back to her in-laws after training but stressed that she before that planned to go to court to make a firm decision about her situation. She explained that she wanted to stand up against her in-laws and show them that she wasn’t afraid of them anymore and this confidence, she explained, had come after taking training at Barli. Many of the girls that were interviewed said that they wished to stay at the Institute after the training was completed. The reason for this was foremost that it would be an opportunity for them to learn further. However, other underlying basis for wanting to stay at the Institute could be identified in the respondent’s answers. One respondent explained that she wanted to buy a sewing machine of her own and start a business in her home village after training but couldn’t since no one was able to support her financially. Thus, if she was given a chance, she said, she wished to stay back at the Institute where her social situation would be more secure and stable.

The image on the left illustrates three trainees during a lecture. The teaching at the Institute is mostly taught in small groups. The Barli Development Institute is well known in Indore. The picture on the right shows the trainees dancing and celebrating The International Women’s day in an article that was published in a newspaper of Madhya Pradesh. The photograph to the left belongs to the author. The picture to the right is taken from the newspaper “I am Indore”

One of the respondents, a grassroots trainee, had returned to her home village after six months training at Barli and then return to the Institute for another six months training. She said that before taking training she had been so afraid of walking by herself in her home village that she only went out when being accompanied by her brother. Being afraid of the other people on the street, she used to tell him to not to let go of her hand. She explained that she didn’t like going back home since she had became used to staying at the institute and that she had left her home village after only four days to return to the institute.

There was no ambiguity of what the trainees aimed to do if or when they would return to their home communities. Most of them wanted to continue with their studies, although only two mentioned that they wished to study at a university level. One of the respondents said that she was dreaming of becoming a police officer or a nurse. Almost all interviewees said that they intended to educate other family members and villagers about health and hygiene, the importance of education and about tailoring. Moreover, they did seem to be very eager to tell other women about the Institute and encourage them to take training themselves.
Outcomes of the training within the trainee’s home villages

Most women from the respondents home villages that previously had taken training at the Institute were doing stitching and tailoring. They were either doing tailoring at their own houses or had opened up shops. The women either earned an income from their tailoring or were doing it for themselves and their families. One girl explained that a previous trainee from her home village Kakoda in the district Khargone had opened up her own tailoring shop and that she earned 2000 rupees\textsuperscript{110} a month through it. She was now able to make a living of her tailoring. The interviewee explained that the woman was in control over her own income but that she chose to spend a large amount of it on her family members.

Previous trainees were also working in health organizations; teaching others in health related issues and was giving vaccinations. One of the trainees, from the village Chivaniya located in the district Badwani, had an elder sister who had received training at the Institute a couple of years ago. The sister had fallen sick shortly after the training was completed and the illness hindered her to work for two years. Being fully recovered today, she has set up her own vegetable shop and earns between 400 and 500 rupees\textsuperscript{111} a day.

The respondent said that the training had helped her sister in resuming her education. Before coming to the Institute, she had not managed to pass her sixth class exam. However, after coming back from Barli, she managed to continue her studying till eight standard. One respondent explained that a previous trainee from the village Mendagarh in the district Khargone had started to work as an insurance agent after having completed the training at Barli. She had received loan from the government to buy a motorcycle after training and is nowadays travelling around to different villages, selling insurances. The respondent explained that she earns three thousand rupees\textsuperscript{112} a week and is able to support her family. Moreover, the respondent said that she today stands out in the village; having a mobile phone, motorcycle and a nice home.

All respondents said that the skills of the women that previously had undergone training at the institute were being well received after coming back to their home communities. It was clear that their skills received a lot of attention from other habitants in the village. They explained that previous trainees at the institute had contributed to an increasing awareness of issues regarding health and the importance of cleanliness within their home communities.

One interviewee explained that previous trainees have a large influence on other villagers in her home community. The previous trainees were very successful in persuading parents to send all their children to school. Her own parents were not willing to send her to the Institute initially. Permission was eventually granted when a Barli graduate managed to convince them to send her for training. Many interviewees highlighted similar stories; they explained that the other villagers hadn’t given much interest to the women before their training at the Institute. After training, however, were their views heard, recognized and listened to. The women had become more respected. One trainee explained that all family decisions were made by the father of the household in her home community. However, she had noticed a positive change among the Barli graduates. Decision making within previous trainees household regarding family issues or fieldwork were to a greater extent based on consultation between the husband and wife.

\textsuperscript{110} 2000 Indian rupees are equal to 44 US- dollars or 279 Swedish crowns.
\textsuperscript{111} 500 Indian rupees are equal to 11 US- dollars or 70 Swedish crowns.
\textsuperscript{112} 3000 Indian rupees are equal to 66 US- dollars or 415 Swedish crowns.
One of the respondents was a previous trainee who today work as staff at the Institute. She has been doing follow up work within trainee’s home villages. She explained that the biggest differences could be seen in villages where a large number of women had taken training. She explained that she especially had seen a large change in the health awareness among families of previous trainees and other village people. She explained that previous trainees to a large extent educate others about children immunization, pregnancy and dehydration. Another previous trainee explained that her skills received a lot of attention once she returned to the village and that all the villagers wanted to look at her stitches.

During a meeting for parents that was held at the institute, informal interviews with some family member’s were conducted. When a father was asked why he had sent his daughter to the institute, he replied that he wanted his daughter to be literate. How would she otherwise be able to work, he asked in return. His daughter had never been sent to school since she was needed at the family house for work. When a brother received the same question he answered that he had sent his sister to the institute so that she could learn how to do tailoring. He explained that his sister was needed for household and fieldwork when she stayed at home, but that her chores could be done by another girl when she was away at the institute. He wished that his sister would receive an income through the skills she received from training once she would return home. He said that rearrangements in the housework would be made once she had completed training so that his sister would have the time to do stitching.

6. ANALYSIS

The purpose of the study was to analyze how investments in women’s education affect community development and women empowerment in a rural area by interviewing and observing women involved within the work of the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women. Before discussing the findings of the study it is important to note that they don’t aim to offer a comprehensive image of institute’s work. The results from this study cannot and shall not be generalized; qualitative approaches produce situated and partial knowledge, but works very well to reveal and offer a description of a part of reality.

6.1 Findings of the study

The first question related to the purpose of the study was to examine which outcomes the training received had in daily life for the women involved within the training. Living at the institute for eight weeks enabled me to see how happy the women felt by being there and how proud they were of taking training. The differences in them compared to before having training were highlighted during interviews and confirmed my observations. Most trainees weren’t able to read and write when they arrived to the institute. They did not know how to tell time from a watch or how to count.

I was able to observe their progress in receiving the various different skills taught at the institute during their training myself since they were eager to show me the knowledge they were gaining. The interviews displayed that many trainees had learnt how to read and write. They had received knowledge in health related issues and had gained skills that might generate an income
once they would return to their home communities. I observed how they gained knowledge in fieldwork, how to use solar energy and about the importance of hygiene. However, the most remarkable findings from the interviews were that many respondents had gained a better self confidence as a result of the training. The changes in the girls were easily observed when the Institute held events for three days to celebrate International Women’s Day. The girls were singing songs, dancing and delivering speeches. The same girl who had told me that she had felt very frightened to interact with other people and to leave her home before coming to the institute was not only holding a speech and made performances during the event; she also seemed to enjoy it. During the field study, it was clear that the institute is effective in making the women feel more confident, aware of their potentialities and proud of their gender.

One underlying factor for this might be that the trainees are surrounded by great role models at the institute. The Director of the institute is a woman. Many members of the staff are women who previously have taken training at the Institute. By being capable women, coming from similar backgrounds as the trainees, they make fine examples of how to walk the talk. When arriving to the institute 52 of 92 were women agreeing upon the statement that education for women is equally important as for men. However, when I posed the same question three months later everyone was agreeing that education for women is equally important as for men.

The second question related to the purpose of this thesis was to examine how the respondents perceived that women’s role and position in their home villages had been affected by the training. The respondents shared their stories of the outcome of training by telling about the livelihoods of previous trainees within their home villages. The findings from the interviews demonstrate that a number of previous trainees have improved their wellbeing in their home communities after training. There are women who earn an income through the skills that they have received at the Institute and some of them seem to have become self-sufficient.

Most of the previous trainees seemed to benefit economically from the vocational skills taught at the institute. There are apparently previous trainees within the respondent’s home villages who have gained a greater voice and respect both at a family- and community level as a result of the training. Many respondents said that other villagers were listening carefully to what previous trainees had to say and that the women had become more respected. Thus, the training had left their role and position within the community enhanced.

Moreover, the training seemed to have led to an increased unity and solidarity among previous trainees within the different communities. Hence, the outcomes of the training were not only evident at a household level. Previous trainees who are capable of persuading parents to send all their children to school and who teach other villagers how to combat different health issues certainly enhance the wellbeing of a whole community.

6.2 The perspective of an outsider
The third question related to the purpose of the thesis is closely interlinked with the first and second. It aimed to examine if the education might lead to an increased ability for the women to make strategic choices concerning their lives. This question seeks to address what the training actually represents for the women involved in it and whether the women can be said to become empowered. This in turn involves a discussion about the institute’s effectiveness in challenging
prevailing norms that works against the women in the context in which they live and contributes to their vulnerable position.

To analyze the outcomes of the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women’s work in empowering rural women within the state of Madhya Pradesh poses challenges when the women’s daily realities are very different from the Western, European context that I am familiar with. The complexities by doing cross-cultural research are mostly evident here. To me, it was clear that tribal women in the state of Madhya Pradesh are living in heavily gender based communities which discriminates them in multiple ways. The women lacked both access to and control over economic and political resource. The social norms within the communities deny her capacity to decide whether or not to be married and with whom, and thus control over her own body. The women’s access to health care is poor and they are frequently becoming victims of physical and psychological abuse. Educating girls is commonly seen as irrelevant within their villages. To me, the women involved within the study were locked in gender roles that marginalized their position in society and denied them capacity to make decisions considering their livelihoods.

Ethnocentrism occurs when a writer, without concerns, describes another culture through the values of the writer’s own culture. This in turn, often leads to a representation of the culture under description as inferior to the other. In order to avoid this study taking such an approach, it is important to recognize that my perspective of the institutes work may not be in line with the women under study due to the fact that we are living within different human geographies.

The notion of culture refers to people’s understandings and experiences of the world. Culture makes an expression of values and ideals that forms different ways of life. It has been found that people from dissimilar cultures commonly have diverse social values, beliefs, expectations and social norms. Cultural diversities manifests themselves by the differences people put into representations and meanings of words and phenomena. Thus, coming from a different culture than the one under study, it is mostly likely that my perspective of notions such as gender equality and women empowerment differ from the institutes and the women under study.

Moreover, studies have found that people living in individualistic cultures normally tend to be independent and focus on their personal interests rather than preferences regarding an entire group. However, people coming from cultures that are characterized by collectivism like the women involved within the study, are generally more interdependent and identify themselves with some kind of group constellation, such as the family or the inhabitants living in their own districts. Within those cultures are norms, aspirations and needs which involve the entire group, the collective, more important than individual ones. Hence, the meaning that I put into terms such as independence and agency may not only differ from the people under study but may also not be equally important and highly prioritized for them.

114 Knox, Paul, Pinch, Steven, Urban Social Geography, Harlow:Pearson, p. 41
The women under study are living under circumstances which are considerably different from women living within a European context. Thus, it is important to bear in mind that non-western women and women with different ethnicities have diverse experiences of gender oppression and views of gender issues than western, feminist approaches. This in turn poses questions of to what extent my western perspectives concerning gender issues are applicable and relevant in order to analyze how the institute’s work affects these women’s life conditions.

Furthermore, it poses questions of what level such an analysis should be at. Is it relevant to discuss problems with inequalities in earned wages between men and women in a context where the majority of the women have to ask a man for permission to step outside the household? Is it important to question fathers’ absence in taking care of the household and children in communities where women to a large extent are being denied ability to decide themselves who the father of her children will be?

Being an outsider who is influenced by Swedish believes of gender issues, one cannot help to question whether the institute truly is challenging gender norms and promote gender equality throughout their work. It was clear during the field work that my view of gender issues wasn’t in line with that at the institute. The institute’s objective for empowering the female part of the population is explained by women’s importance in raising children. Since women as a group are being classified as the best supervisors of future generations, I would argue that this objective contradicts with the institute’s aim to reach gender equality. The statement assumes that responsibilities among women and men should be divided and thus, doesn’t challenge women and men’s responsibilities within the family.

The view of a woman holding traditionally female characteristics such as being the best supervisor for children, with nurturing and caring attributes was rather promoted than challenged by the institute. Not questioning women’s responsibilities within the informal labour market causes difficulties for women who seek entering the formal one. To provide the trainees with income generating skills is positive since access to economic resource is necessary in order to gain power over one’s own life.

However, to enhance women’s capacity to participate within the formal labour market without challenging their responsibilities in the family may double their workload. Investments that seek to lower gender inequalities should advocate reduction of all barriers in society that lock both men and women in inherited gender roles. Hence, all traditional expectations of what is appropriate behavior among men and women should be questioned. However, many of the skills that the trainees receive at the Institute works well to move the women’s reproductive role within the household forward. The growing awareness within the fields of health and hygiene makes an additional example of this.

Considering the cultural differences between Sweden and India one could argue that the approach of the Institute is a more pragmatic but realistic road towards equality between woman and men in a patriarchy. It is important to keep in mind that development programs that aim to improve people’s life conditions have to connect to these people’s cultural heritage and that they have to be realistic. To provide the women training without any connection to the context they come from would probably rather harm than empower them.
6.3 A holistic path towards empowerment

The Barli Development Institute for Rural Women’s model of empowerment builds capacity in the course participating women in a holistic way. The training teaches them how to read and write. It provides them with income generating skills which enable the trainees to participate in formal labour markets. Furthermore, the training involves education regarding health and nutrition which helps the women to ensure their own as well as other people’s wellbeing. It raises the women’s environmental awareness. The training also builds capacity as women grow mentally by straightening their self confidence. The interview sessions revealed that the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women’s training can empower the women undergoing training in many ways.

As already mentioned in this chapter, it was clear that the respondents had gained a greater self confidence during training. The trainees showed capacity, in line with Gupta and Yesudian’s assumptions, to overcome external barriers due to their grown sense of personal worth. The respondent who had made up her mind to refuse marrying a man with what she considered as bad habits during training makes an example of a woman that has gained a greater control over her life due to a her grown self confidence. Similarly, the trainee who used to feel very frightened each time she left home before taking training and no longer isn’t can be said to have become empowered in a similar way. Furthermore, the married woman who wanted to stand up against her parents in law in court makes an additional example.

The institute’s literacy training is fundamental for the women to gain power over their own lives. Illiteracy decreases a person’s ability to obtain information in various forms and thus, diminish their ability to control their lives. Moreover, illiteracy makes people vulnerable to various forms of exploitations. However, the Director of the institute Mrs. Palta McGilligan describes it very well when she states that the literacy training provides the women with tools to understand themselves and the world in which they live.

As already mentioned in a previous chapter there is a distinction between a woman’s access to resources and her ability to control them. Anderson and Eswaran underlines the importance of the control of the money a woman earns if she is to gain any real influence over her wellbeing and life. To be in control of the earnings is the crucial indicator of empowerment. Their reasoning is applicable in this study as well. The institute is effective in providing the women with a wide range of skills and knowledge; hence giving them access to different resources. However, there is a risk that the women have a limited ability to control the skills that they have received for their own benefits once they return to their home communities. The training has obviously led to an enhanced income capacity among many Barli graduates. However, to what extent the women actually have control over their own work and income remains unknown.

The interviews showed that the training has motivated a large proportion of the women to study further and resume their studies in their home villages. However, the problem was never that the women weren’t motivated to study in their home communities. They were unable to attend school for different reasons that were beyond their own control.

One mother expressed a concern for her daughter’s future during a friendly conversation. She explained that she had sent her daughter to the institute with the hope that she would learn how to read and write and about health and hygiene. She wished that her daughter would learn
how to do stitching and that she would be able to make a living through it. During the conversation, the mother expressed a concern for her daughter’s future. If her daughter would marry a well educated man she explained, he would let her do stitching. Otherwise, she probably would have to work in the fields. The mother’s concerns for her daughter’s future demonstrate women’s lack of influence over their own livelihoods very well. Her daughter would only be able to utilize her knowledge to stitch if she gets permission from her husband to do so.

The interviews revealed that many course participating women didn’t want to leave the institute since it provided a safe, enabling environment for them that was more or less absent within their home communities. To ensure the women’s wellbeing and control over their knowledge’s once they go back to their home village’s poses a big challenge for the institute. Frequent follow-ups by visits to previous trainee’s home villages should be made by staff at the institute to ensure that the women won’t get harmed when they confront traditional gender norms. Furthermore, to somehow integrate men within the training could be a means to ensure that the women’s role and position enhances within the communities once they come home.

As already mentioned in a previous chapter, the institute recognizes the importance of women recalling themselves as equal to men in order to reach gender equality. However, it is hard to bring social change within a community when leaving half of the population left out from the transformation process. Hence, it is essential that this information also encompasses men. The outcome of the training is to a large extant dependant on men’s attitude towards the possibilities created by the acquired skills. In the cultural setting it is men who decide whether a possibility also is an opportunity.

To train all the women undergoing training in tailoring might lead to competition once they go back to their home villages. However, a more varied palette of income generating skills taught at the Institute would address this problem. Building capacity in computer literacy among the trainees could be integrated in the training curriculum. Despite the fact that rural and tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh generally have a lack of access to electricity and technology, this may not be the case in ten years from now. Due to the course participating women’s young age, and given the rapid growth in the ICT- sectors in India; it is likely that the women will experience a digital revolution during their lifetime. As Jain argues, ICT has proven itself to be an efficient tool towards women empowerment since technological infrastructure work as an ultimate information channel and thus, provide access to markets.

6.4 Concluding remarks
Parents and husbands may be willing to send their daughters and wives to the institute because the training provides them with skills that may contribute to the family economy. However, during training the women receive not only the income generating skills that are of their family member’s interests but also basic knowledge that in the long run can transform their role and position in society. I would argue that the women’s literacy skills are fundamental in order to change the asymmetrical power structures between men and women within these communities. Education is the only road towards political and social conscious-raising. In the long run, sending the women for training is a win- win situation for both genders.

During my work with this thesis I came to realize that there is a fine line between providing women with tools to make strategic life choices and to impose a lifestyle upon them.
Therefore, it is important when involved with strategies aiming to empower people to recognize that the notion of empowerment refers to the process where people gain power to form their own lives. However, what brings power over one’s life is a highly individual feeling. Hence, an empowering process of the women taking training at the Barli Institute takes place when they gain a greater control over their role and position in society on their own terms.

All enforcements from other people telling the trainees how to live their lives would weaken the empowering process. Thus, the empowerment diminishes as soon as the women are forced to follow someone else’s master plan for their own wellbeing regardless of the enforcements comes from a male family member, development agencies, staff at the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women, scholars or a Swedish student.
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APPENDIX

Interview guide

How did you come to know about the Barli Institute?

Were there any skills in particular that you hoped to receive by taking training?

Are there women from your home village that has taken training at the Barli Institute? If so, what are they doing now?

How do you experience that the skills and knowledge’s of these women are being received by their family members and other habitants in the village?

How do you think that your skills and knowledge will be received once you go back to your home village?