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Interacting between Policy and Practice

Influences of interests, understandings and power relations in shaping development
interventions concerning gender equality

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Margo Catharina Bakker

Dik Roth
Jeroen Warner

SDC-80433

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For quality of life

Abstract

Policy shapes practice. At least, that is the idea behind putting the right policy in place: to increase the chances that the work that is done is effective. Responding to global trends, policy is constantly changing to make sure it is not outdated and still can realistically shape the practice on the ground. However, the question is if policy indeed shapes practice, and in what way. According to Long (2001) there are many specific factors, shaped by humans and their realities, which need to be taken into account when studying social change and development. These factors can not only be found on the level of designing policy, but also within interfaces between actors like NGOs and local populations. In this thesis an answer is found to the question of how social interfaces can shape women's participation. Different levels of development and 'implementation' of policy concerning women's participation are analysed, looking at international agreements, national policies, organisation's practices and the experiences of the target groups. At all these levels values, interests, knowledge and power relations of actors involved influence the way women's participation turns out in reality. Data is collected in the form of document analysis, looking at content of international agreements and national policy documents. Interviews and observations are conducted in the rural areas of Bauphal and Dumki in Bangladesh. In these areas the local organisation SLOPB sets up committees in which women can co-decide on issues around water and sanitation. Even though international agreements, national policies and national laws are in place to create a space for women to participate, in reality women's voices are limited because of cultural embedded values around gender roles. Next to that, differences in understandings about fundamental concepts of the programme lead to other outcomes than intended. This creates a gap between policy and practice which is maintained by actors at different levels who all use the vagueness of policy and the gap for their own interests. This research shows that social interfaces at the meso level, but especially at the micro level have a high impact on how women's participation turns out in practice.

Key words

Social interfaces, women's participation, policy, practice, social sustainability, rural Bangladesh

1. Introduction

'You see that women's empowerment is gradually improving. But if you see the rural context, especially the Bangladesh context, it still will take time. But I see the changes. Slowly, slowly the change is being made.'

- Mr. Zunaed Ali, Director SLOPB-

Women's empowerment is high on the agenda of development cooperation. Gender equality is generally seen as the way forward to eliminate poverty and women are supposed to be the agents of change. Empowering women means they have an increased ability to make choices and can expand their freedom (Narayan, 2002 in Malhotra and Schuler, 2005, 71). International agreements and national policies reflect this importance. One of the eight Millennium Development Goals is dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment and there is no doubt that there will be a successor to this goal in the new development framework beyond 2015. Furthermore, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which is a treaty adopted in 1979, is incorporated in many national policies. For instance, since their commitment to CEDAW Bangladesh implemented several policies targeting women and took on strategies to promote gender equality (United Nations, 2003).

The idea behind these policies is that practice on the ground will improve and that women will indeed be empowered. The assumption here is that good policy leads to better practice. Both governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) base their development interventions on policies, or can be stimulated to do so through funding opportunities. However, the path from policy to practice is not as straight forward as it seems here. There are many actors involved in shaping policy and practice and everything in between and they all interact within their specific context. These actors can vary from country delegates to local community members and from NGO staff to policy makers. Behind interactions between those actors lie pre-occupations, cultural values and differences in knowledge which all shape the outcomes of interactions. Long (2001) captures this in his definition of social interfaces: 'a social interface is a critical point of intersection between different life worlds, social fields or levels of social organization, where social discontinuities based upon discrepancies in values, interests, knowledges and power, are most likely to be located' (p.243).

This means there are many specific factors, shaped by humans and their realities, which need to be taken into account when studying social change, shaping development interventions or implementing projects. These factors create a unique social interface dependent upon the specific context, shaping policy and practice. At an international level, for example, power relations between states parties can play a role in coming to an agreement about development interventions or approaches. Social interfaces can also contribute to a gap between the ideas on paper and the realities on the ground. If values of a target group conflict with values underlying an intervention, problems may arise affecting the outcomes of the intervention. However, this gap between policy and practice can also be functional in a way that the vagueness of policy gives space for projects to operate in their own specific context, while also fitting the policy framework. In this way success and failure can be negotiated and labelling a project as one or the other becomes more flexible and less clear (Mosse, 2004).

Interventions concerning women's empowerment are prone to influences of values, interests and understandings of actors on different levels. There are many factors which can influence the design, implementation and outcomes of interventions aiming at empowerment of women. The gap between policy and practice also gives actors room to shape these interventions and its outcomes. All of this makes the shaping of an intervention a complicated process. In this thesis I will analyse how actors interact on the topic of women's empowerment in and between the different levels in which

policy and practice are negotiated and how this shapes practice on the ground. I will do this by answering the research question 'How do social interfaces in and between the spaces of policy and practice shape women's participation on the ground'? To answer this question I performed a document analysis and conducted fieldwork in the Southern rural areas of Bangladesh.

In the following chapters I will discuss the influence of social interfaces on the relation between international agreements, national policies, organisational strategies and local practices. In chapter 2 a theoretical framework is provided in which I will dive into theories on social interfaces and link them with theories concerning policy and practice as well as women's empowerment and participation. In chapter 3 the concept of international agreements is described and I will explore how and why agreements on gender equality are incorporated in national policies. Both Bangladesh and the Netherlands are used as an example. The document analysis serves as input for this chapter. In chapter 4 attention is given to how Dutch and Bangladeshi NGOs directly and indirectly, voluntarily and semi-compulsorily, respond to these national policies and how the responses can influence a project and its outcomes. The findings presented here are based on both the document analysis and on the fieldwork results. Then in chapter 5 main results retrieved from Bangladesh are outlined concerning local social interfaces which influence a project in its own way and how they relate to organisational strategies from the Netherlands. Finally, I will conclude by showing how social interfaces can shape women's participation in practice.

2. Social interfaces in theory

Development interventions are designed to make a change for the better. These interventions can have high level aims such as ending global warming or eliminating extreme poverty by raising awareness or empowering marginalized groups. However, as time and research have shown many of these interventions do not always have the expected impact. To change this, governments try to develop the right policy to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of development cooperation. Furthermore, to ensure policy is not outdated policy makers have to respond to global trends, to make sure it still can realistically shape the practice on the ground. However, according to many scholars development cooperation cannot be seen as a straight line from policy to practice. Norman Long, for instance, thinks that development trajectories are seen as too linear and that change does not just occur due to external forces like development policy. He argues instead that an actor-oriented approach towards development in which there is a central role for interactions between actors at different levels should be used (Schuurman, 1993). Understandings, interests and values differ per person, per community and per government, which shape outcomes of development interventions in a specific way (Long, 2001). In this chapter I will dive deeper in the theory concerning these social interactions and its relation to development interventions. I will start with an introduction on social interfaces, after which I will turn to the relation between social interfaces and policy and practice. Then, I will link social interfaces with women's empowerment and participation. I will conclude with presenting my research questions, setting and methodology.

Actors within development

Even though policy is designed to lead to better practice, this path is not that linear. Scholars like Norman Long and David Mosse argue that human agency and interactions play a major role in shaping development outcomes which policy cannot forestall. Policy is not just something that is imposed and implemented on passive humans, but is actively shaped by human agency and adjusted to their personal needs, specific contexts and power relations (Lewis and Mosse, 2006; Long and Liu, 2009). For instance, for organisations in search of funding it is important to respond to the language of development that is used by their donor. It is key to frame and translate a project in a way it matches the policy discourse (Mosse, 2004). In this way actors keep control over their own projects and needs, while getting the most benefit from national and international policies (Arce,1999). In this case needs are the driving force behind a project, not a broader policy (Mosse, 2004).

These ideas derive from the actor-oriented approach towards development which Long called for in the 1970's. Central to this approach is the analysis of social interfaces between actors. Actors in this sense do not have to be individuals but can also be corporations, NGOs or state bureaucracy. A social interface is 'a critical point of intersection between different life worlds, social fields or levels of social organization, where social discontinuities based upon discrepancies in values, interests, knowledges and power, are most likely to be located' (Long, 2001, p.243). Dynamics within these interfaces entail 'negotiation, accommodation and the struggle over definitions and boundaries' (Long and Villarreal, 1993, p.143).

Social interfaces can be analysed in different levels, for example the micro-level of families and households, in which different values, knowledges and interests can exists between families, generations or gender. What is given more attention to within the actor-oriented approach though, are interfaces between these different levels, like the meso or macro-level (Schuurman, 1993). What is meant with the meso-level is the wider context outside of an individual like a community, an organisation or the local state. The macro level is the even wider context like the society, the national state or global institutions. What happens within these levels influences the other levels, not just from the macro-level to the micro-level, but also the other way around (Schuurman, 1993). Power relations

and understandings of actors within the levels play an important role in interfaces with actors within and between levels. This means these many specific factors, shaped by actors and their realities, need to be taken into account when designing or analysing development interventions.

The importance of analysing interfaces is clearly described by Long and Villarreal: 'A detailed study of them provides insights into the processes by which policy is transformed, how 'empowerment' and room for manoeuvre is created by both interveners and 'clients', and how persons are enrolled in the 'projects' of others through the use of metaphors and images of development' (1993, p.145). In the following paragraph I will shortly explore the role of interfaces in policy transformation, influencing practice and the gap between the two.

Social interface and manoeuvring between policy and practice

Social interfaces play a role in shaping policy, in shaping practice and shaping the area in between policy and practice. At all these levels actors interact and influence processes in their own unique way. At the policy level actors have their own values and understandings concerning development. Policy makers, NGOs and lobbyists try to shape policy to what they think that is needed. Mosse (2004) sees another role for policy than just trying to shape practice. He argues that policy is in place to legitimise practice as a way to maintain political support. The 'language of development' (Arce, 1999) is an important aspect of this proposition. Policy documents contain a lot of popular terms like 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'good governance'. If development interventions can be placed and translated into the global development language, practice can be legitimized because it falls into global strategies and issues that have been placed importance to. Governments might want to do this to show their support to global development agendas and in this way they can maintain political support and keep power relations in place (Arce, 1999, Lewis and Mosse, 2006). In this example responding to international trends is a social interface in which interests and power play a role. Next to this macro level, interfaces are found at all levels of interaction, also on the meso and micro level. An example of how interfaces play a role between these two levels are experiences of change and coping strategies that people have. Also in the implementation phase of a project interfaces shape the outcomes. Arce (1999) identified that the way that local people deal with the chances and changes that a project brings has its own effect on the outcomes of this project. Even though policy is in place and projects are directly linked to them (which is not realistic in the first place), knowledges and values shape the outcomes and practices within a project.

Then there is also a big gap between policy and practice, in which policy not necessarily trickles down but plays a certain role in shaping practice and practice in turn is playing a role in shaping policy. It is often tried to manage by basing policy on best practices and making sure that the ideas on paper match social realities (Lewis and Mosse, 2006). The gap, however, is a fact of life and, as Mosse (2004) argues, instead of looking at how it can be closed it is more interesting to look at how this gap is dealt with. Actors might use this gap and contribute to the creation of the gap. Mosse (2004) explains the functionality of this gap in that the vagueness of policy language is necessary 'to conceal ideological differences, allow compromise and the enrolment of different interests, to distribute agency and multiply criteria of success within project systems' (p19). For instance, because of 'the gap' the judgement about the success or failure of a project can be negotiated between project actors and are not that easy to distinguish. There is always a part of the outcome of a project that can fit some sort of policy language. Does a project not fit in the participatory approach, but did it have an impact on livelihoods? Then the process can be taken out of the judgement and the focus will be on the results (Mosse, 2004). Projects do work within policy because there is a lot of room left for interpretation and in turn projects help sustain policy models by entailing a big offer of interpretations of events to choose from.

Within this thesis the role of social interfaces on policy and practices concerning women's empowerment through women's participation plays a central role. In the next paragraph I will explore theories of women's empowerment and participation and place them in the context of social interfaces within policy and practice.

Women's empowerment
The term 'women's empowerment' can be found in policy texts or NGO strategies, in international agreements and in descriptions of local projects. Empowerment approaches are based on the belief that marginalized people (the poor, women, etc.) are the ones who can and also want to make a change in their lives and bring about development. Empowerment is increasing the power of people who did not have it before. Power can be seen as the ability to make choices, thus empowerment is the 'expansion of freedom of choice and action' (Narayan, 2002 in Malhotra and Schuler, 2005, 71). It means that there should be alternatives to choose from and that people need to be aware of these alternatives (Kabeer, 2005).

Empowerment is a relational concept which means it is shaped by interactions between 1) those who are being empowered and those who are trying to stimulate empowerment and between 2) those who are being empowered and their environment. Understandings of concepts like empowerment, gender equality and meaningful participation, values concerning the role of women and interests in keeping power all play a role in shaping policy, interventions and outcomes. This can again take place from the macro to the micro level in which actors interact. The lack of women's power can lie in their household, community, or even in a whole society. This means women's empowerment not only needs institutional transformation for empowerment to take place, but also a systemic transformation, especially in patriarchal societies (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005). Empowering people means bringing about a shift in power relations between those without power and the powerful. The World Bank identifies four elements that can change these power relations: 'access to information, inclusion and participation, social accountability and local organizational capacity' (Narayan, 2002, 4). These four elements are used as approaches to empower women.

Women's participation is a commonly used approach to bring about women's empowerment. By letting women participate in informal or formal decision making bodies, the chances to let their voice be heard increases so they can hold decision makers accountable for their promises and actions. Also within this approach social interfaces have their influence on outcomes of projects stimulating participation. Reasons differ for letting people participate, which is important to take into account when analysing social interfaces within participation approaches. Stimulating participation out of obligation is different than using it for the reason to bring about change and development. Overall, reasons for using the participation approach changed over time. In the 1940's and 50's it was used as an approach to community development where community participation was seen as an obligation of citizenship. In the 1960s it was also used as an approach to secure stability and strengthen the political system, through political participation. Citizen participation evolved from an obligation of citizenship to a right of citizenship in which subordination and marginalization could be challenged. From the 1980s on participation was used on a project level as well, instead of only focusing on participation in broader political communities. This was needed because of the failures of top-down development projects and planning and because social capital was more and more seen as a basis for economic growth (Hickey and Mohan, 2004).

Next to these different reasons to stimulate participation, the concept also has different gradations. Arnstein (1969) points out there is a gap between participation and having the real power to make decisions. The one doesn't immediately lead to the other. To reflect the different types of participation Arnstein developed a ladder with eight different rungs, each indicating a different gradation of citizen participation, with the lowest being a form of non-participation and the highest

being citizen power. Figure 1 shows all the steps on this ladder. The first two steps of the ladder point to non-participation. The goal of these types are for the power holders to educate the 'participants'. Steps 3, 4 and 5 are classified in degrees of tokenism in which citizens are given the chance to let their voice be heard, but in which they lack the power to ensure their views are incorporated in the final decisions. The last two steps are degrees of citizen power in which citizens can negotiate about outcomes of decisions or where they have their own decision-making seats. This typology of levels of participation can help in analysing such a complicated concept (Arnstein, 1969).

Figure 1: Eight rungs on a ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969).
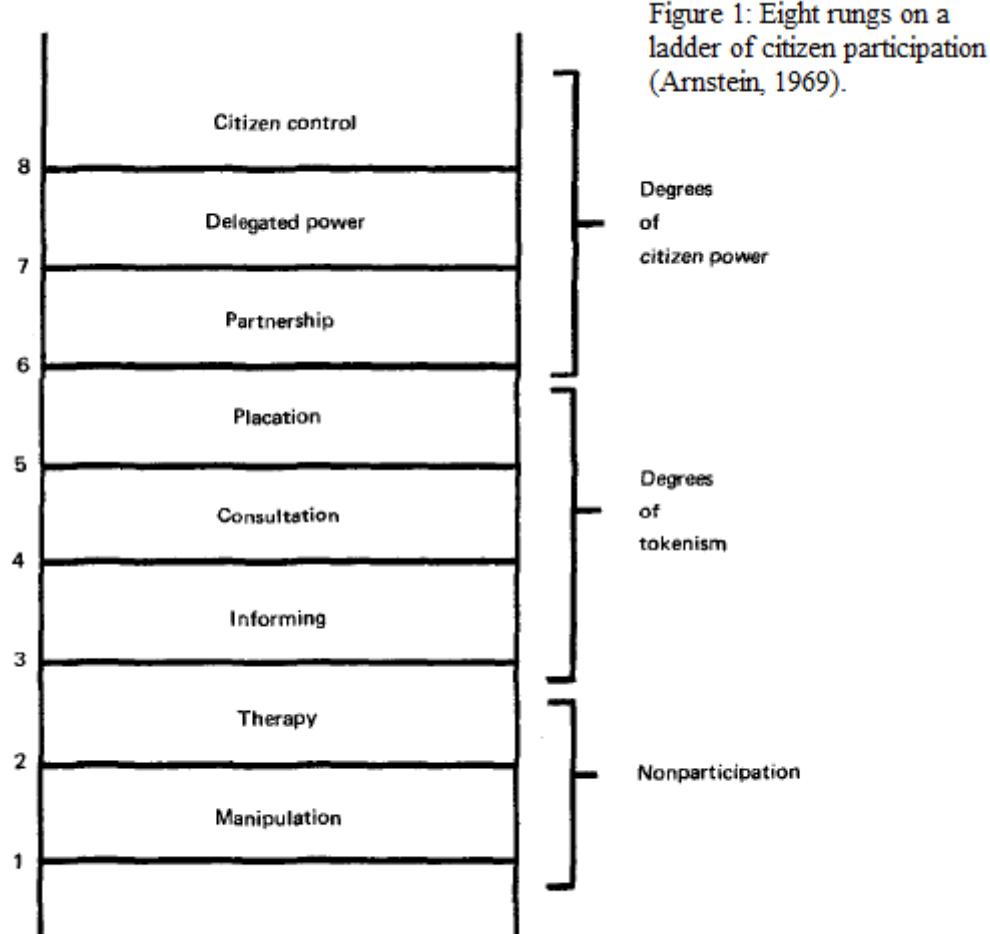
Guaraldo Choguill (1996) made in turn a different ladder of participation adjusted to developing countries, arguing that citizens in developing countries need more than citizen power to make improvements to their communities, like the opportunity to claim their rights to make 'permanent changes to the status quo' (p.432). She also argues that citizen or community participation is more effective when there is external support, from for example the government or an NGO. This goes hand in hand with the willingness of governments to cooperate and the resources they have to respond. That is why in the rungs of Guaraldo Choguills (figure 2) the role of the government is taken into account more.

However, the gradation of participation is highly influenced by context related values, understandings and interests. When looking at women's participation in specific, the view on gender in a country shapes the outcomes or impact of such activities. Giving women a chance to participate in decision making processes doesn't necessarily mean their voice is really being heard. Participation projects do not really have an impact for women if they are viewed as people without knowledge and are not taken seriously. The meaning of participation is also dependent on the power of individuals

and groups and the power relations between them. 'Different groups experience a different quality of participation and the voices and views of some groups are given greater weight than the voices of other groups' (Shortall, 2008, p452). Concerning women's participation it can also mean that only to elite women are given a voice, who might not consider, or do not listen to the needs of their less fortunate 'sisters' (Cornwall, 2003).

Figure 2: A ladder of community participation for underdeveloped countries (Guaraldo Choguill, 1996)
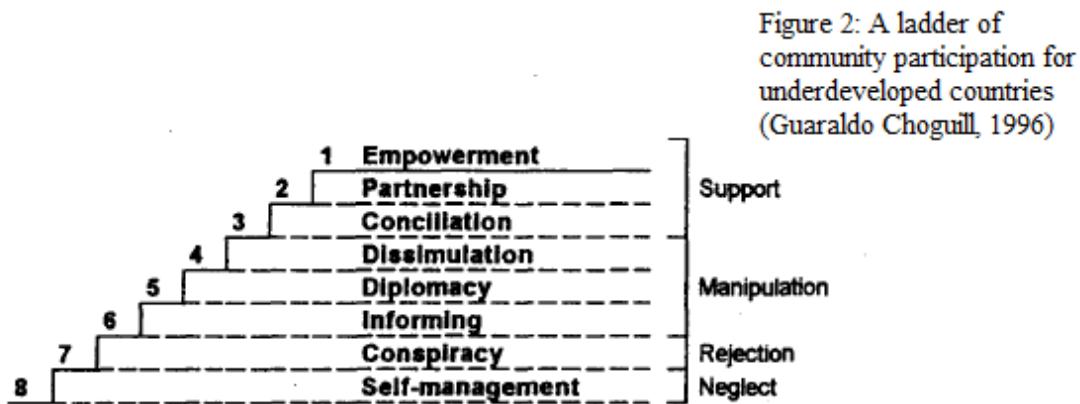
Research questions, setting and methodology

As has been explained above, interventions concerning women's empowerment are prone to influences of values, interests and understandings of actors on different levels. There are many factors which can influence the design, implementation and outcomes of interventions aiming at empowerment of women. The gap between policy and practice also gives actors room to shape these interventions and its outcomes. All of this makes the shaping of an intervention a complicated process.

In this thesis I will analyse how actors interact on the topic of women's empowerment in and between the different levels (macro-meso-micro) in which policy and practice are negotiated and how this shapes practice on the ground. I will focus on one approach of women's empowerment, namely women's participation. I will do this by answering the research question 'How do social interfaces in and between the spaces of policy and practice shape women's participation on the ground'? To be able to answer this question it is divided into sub-questions:

1. How do actors negotiate and shape women's empowerment in international agreements and national policies?
2. How do actors negotiate and shape the design and implementation of interventions on women's empowerment and participation?
3. How do the interactions that take place between actors on different levels relate to and influence each other?

The second sub-questions will be split up in two chapters. In the first chapter the focus lies on the role of organisations in negotiating and shaping interventions in their own context and in the other chapter the role of the local context and interactions on the ground are analysed. The third sub-question is incorporated in all chapters.

To answer these questions I performed a document analysis and looked into a project concerning women's participation. Through my internship organisation at the time (Simavi) I had access to organisations in several countries which implement these kind of projects. All of these

projects were designed by the organisations themselves but had to have links with the broader programme of Simavi. I chose a project in rural Bangladesh because of the patriarchal culture of Bangladesh and because of the highly unequal position of women in (rural) Bangladeshi society. I assumed that this specific social and cultural context would have an influence on women's participation interventions. Analysing this project would enable me to look into social interfaces in different domains and help in finding answers to my research questions. Therefore I conducted fieldwork from June until September 2013 with the NGO SLOPB (Stichting Land Ontwikkelings Project Bangladesh) in coastal areas in the South of Bangladesh.

SLOPB is a Bangladeshi NGO set up by a Dutchman who was adopted from Bangladesh. SLOPB is financially and technically supported by the Dutch NGO Simavi. With their support, SLOPB is implementing a project related to the role of women in accessing water and sanitation services: the Sustainable Health and WatSan (water and sanitation) Development Project. This Sustainable Health and WatSan Development Project is part of a broader program set up by Simavi and five other Dutch organisations[1] who form the Dutch WASH Alliance. In Bangladesh the partners of these organisations form the Bangladesh WASH Alliance. Figure 3 is a visualisation of this structure. This means that SLOPB has a direct relation with Simavi and an indirect relation with the Dutch WASH Alliance. Their work contributes to the total results of the Bangladesh WASH Alliance and with this to the overall results of the WASH Alliance.

Figure 3: Structure of the Dutch WASH Alliance
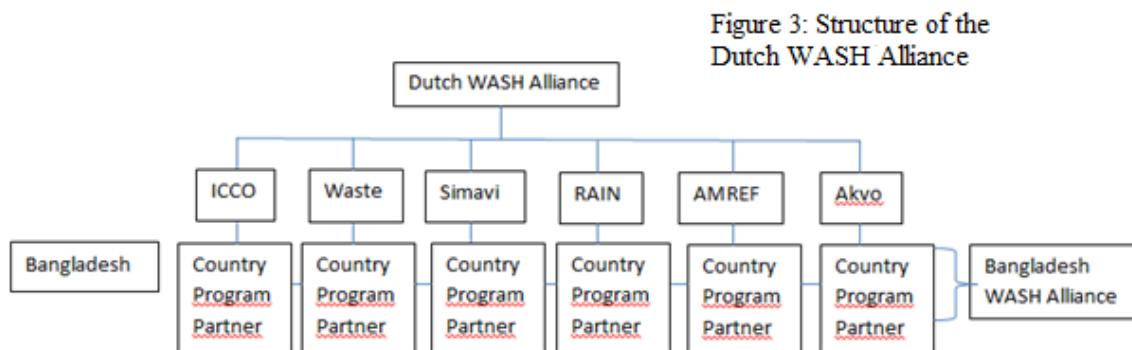
The main aim of the project of SLOPB is to improve water and sanitation practices and access to services through installing local committees. SLOPB created three levels of committees in which participants learn about good water and sanitation practices, but also how to claim their rights concerning water and sanitation in local decision making bodies. The levels where these committees are installed are the Union, the Ward and the community level. These levels partly relate to the administrative system of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is divided in several divisions, which are in turn split up in several smaller regions (Upazila's). These Upazila's consist of Unions. A Union is the smallest administrative unit of Bangladesh and is the lowest level of local government. A Union is made up of nine villages, called Wards. SLOPB selected three areas in each Ward to mark communities. The project aims to empower women by giving rural women a voice in the committees at these three levels so they can express their needs and wishes in their communities, Wards and in local government.

The committees of SLOPB are set up in the Upazila's of Bauphal, Dumki and Borguna, which are placed in the delta in the South of Bangladesh. Data were collected in the areas of Bauphal and Dumki. These areas were chosen because they were best accessible from the head office and the

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[1] Simavi, AMREF Flying Doctors, RAIN, Waste, ICCO and Akvo.

university in which I stayed. A possible bias in this can be that the Upazila of Borguna is a bit more isolated than the other Upazila's, and the living circumstances there might be different. However, from the locations I stayed in I travelled a lot to remote areas in the Upazila's which might decrease the chances that this significantly biases my research outcomes.

The members of the committees in the areas of Bauphal and Dumki were interviewed using semi-structured interviews and observations were carried out during committee meetings. Members in the committees were mainly rural women, but also local government officials (m/f), Imams and rural men. Data was collected in all three levels of committees, but mostly at the community and ward level for the practical reason that these were organised many times a month, while the union committees were rare. Furthermore, other women and men living in the areas were interviewed, using unstructured interviews. Lastly, semi-structured interviews with employees of SLOPB and the WASH Alliance were conducted. Next to fieldwork I conducted a document analysis. The documents that are analysed are national policy documents (Dutch and Bangladeshi), international resolutions and project proposals. In these documents I analysed how women's empowerment was included, how the national policy documents reflected the view and requests on women's empowerment of the international resolutions, and how the project proposals reflected national policies or organizational strategies.

Bangladeshi context
As mentioned above I chose to collect data in Bangladesh because I assumed that the specific context would have an influence on women's participation interventions. My assumptions were based on the fact that the country has a patriarchal culture and ranks 111 on the Gender Equality Index, with the lowest ranking being 148 (UNDP, 2014). When comparing this with India (132) and Pakistan (123), which Bangladesh was a part of once, the country scores best. However, looking at the region comparing it with Nepal (102), Buthan (92) and neighbouring country Myanmar (80) they score low (UNDP, 2012). The low ranking indicates that the position of Bangladeshi women in society is not equal to that of Bangladeshi men. The report to monitor the progress of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations, 2003) mentions that in Bangladesh the 'status and roles of men and women have primarily been shaped by the stereotype of male predominance and authority over women' (p16). Women in Bangladesh face more difficulties than men in many aspects of life like in health, nutrition and labour. It is one of the seven countries in the world where there are more men than women, which might be due to discrimination in terms of nutrition and healthcare. In households less money is spent on medication for women than for men, which means women and girls do not receive the same treatment when they are sick (United Nations, 2003).

To improve gender equality the government of Bangladesh has women as a specific target group in their national policies and development plans. One way to promote gender equality is to improve women's political participation. Women's representation in Parliament already exists since 1979, but they are nominated and voted for by the elected male parliamentarians. In other governmental levels (like in Upazila and Union Parishad councils), there are 'reserved' seats for women to ensure they are represented. Women can also run for the normal seats in these councils. Still, women's participation in political processes face some problems. These include 'the lack of appropriate and adequate organizational arrangements within political parties for women's participation, low inclusion of women in the political parties and especially in decision making hierarchies and a lack of political training of women' (United Nations, 2003, p24).

A factor that also can influence the participation of women (but also of men) is the hierarchical culture of Bangladesh. This hierarchical culture affects decision making styles. This means that people with a higher professional function or a higher social status have a bigger say in decisions. Generally there is room for participation by others, but this can be described as consultative

participation: other opinions are taken along in decisions, but they don't weigh as much as the opinion of the one highest in the hierarchy (Kazi, 2009). This strokes with the participation rung of placation in Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation, in which people are involved in decision making, but only have some sort of advice role and do not have a final say. 'It is the person instead of the group which makes a decision' in Bangladesh (Kazi, 2009, p3).

Next to the context concerning gender equality and women participation it is relevant to share information about the geographical and demographical context of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a country in the South of Asia and has the biggest delta in the world. This area is prone to floods during the summer monsoon, which occurs from June to October each year (CIA, 2014). Bangladesh has a population of 166,280,712 (CIA, 2014) and with 834 people per square metre Bangladesh is also one of the most densely populated countries in the world (United Nations, 2003). 89.5% of the population in Bangladesh is Muslim and 9.6% is Hindu (CIA, 2014).

This specific context of Bangladesh was a reason that my research was sometimes a bit hard to conduct. I travelled to the delta of Bangladesh in June and stayed till September, which is right in the summer monsoon season. The rain washed holes into the dirt roads and made them muddy, which made transportation uncomfortable and lengthy. Travelling to a committee meeting took a lot of time, so attending multiple meetings on one day was often impossible. Next to that July was the month of the Ramadan, in which Muslims were not allowed to eat and drink between sunrise and sunset. In this month less work is done, and more time is spend with family. This made the planning for my interviews more difficult as well: during the Ramadan people were less flexible in travelling and after the Ramadan there was a holiday (eid l fitr) for a week in which people were visited family members. I knew about the rainy season and the Ramadan before I went to Bangladesh, but due to practical reasons I could not travel any earlier or later than that summer.

Another factor which complicated my research was the density of the population which was also notable in the remote rural areas in the delta of Bangladesh. Privacy was hard to find. Doors were always open, windows did not have glass and people were everywhere. This made it difficult to have private interviews in which people could talk openly without anybody hearing them. People walked in and out, and when someone with a higher ranking in Bangladeshi hierarchy walked in, interviewees stopped talking and the higher ranked person took over. In some occasions my female translator was told to stop translating because it bothered the men in the room. I will elaborate on these last two points in chapter 5. All of this made that the process of conducting interviews took a lot of time, patience and effort.

In this chapter I presented a theoretical framework and research questions which I will try to use and answer throughout the following chapters. In chapter 3 I will present my findings retrieved from the document analysis and start with answering the first sub-question (focussing on international agreements and national policies).

3. Agreements and policy

'In contrast with India, in each area Bangladesh has come from behind and surpassed it. And the moving force has been the rapid development of women's empowerment'
-Amartya Sen at the 67th session of the UN General Assembly (UNDP, 2013)-

Global trends in development cooperation change over time. New and unforeseen development issues arise and some are so extensive that they take a big position in international development discourse. For example, climate change and environmental sustainability have become more pressing over the last few years after studies have shown what it entails and how it affects global security and poverty. Conferences on international development almost always include an environmental aspect nowadays. Furthermore, views on how to eliminate poverty are diverse and approaches on how to tackle poverty are developed, implemented, evaluated and adjusted again. For example, targeting poor people directly and meeting their basic human needs was the approach taken in the 1970s. In the 1980s a bigger context was taken into account where donors made aid recipients put certain policies in place to make aid more effective. NGO's also started to focus more on advocacy so poor people could make a more structural change in their countries themselves (Riddell, 2007). Now, thirty years later, according to the Dutch international development policy development aid should go hand in hand with trade and the private sector in order to target poverty in a sustainable way (Rijksoverheid, 2013).

A large part of national policies are related to certain international discourse, global trends and views concerning poverty reduction and development. International conferences often end with agreements on guidelines how to reach for instance elimination of poverty or universal recognition of human rights. Within these agreements UN Member States call upon governments to develop policy to reach specific goals. Countries sometimes respond by reflecting aspects of international agreements in national policies. They are not obliged to however, so why do they actually include this in their policies? In this chapter a description is given of how international agreements can have an influence on national policies and laws, and how international agreements concerning gender equality and women's empowerment shape national policy on this subject. First, a short introduction is given about what international agreements are and how they are negotiated. Then the question of why and to what extent states comply with international agreements is explored in the light of social interfaces. Values, knowledges and power relations might have their influence on how international documents are negotiated and if agreements are translated into national policies and agendas. Finally, to illustrate the relation between international agreements and policy, this chapter will show how gender equality and women's empowerment is included in recent and current international agreements and how and why this is reflected in Dutch and Bangladeshi national policy.

Internationally negotiated documents: the how and why
International agreements are made by member states of the United Nations. Multiple times a year country delegations come together, mainly in New York, to discuss matters concerning international development, trade, environmental sustainability, human rights, etc. They formulate agreements on how progress can be made on these matters and how countries can stimulate or facilitate this progress. To put agreements on paper, the United Nations develops so-called outcome documents. Most times the discussion is held on the basis of this outcome document. The two paragraphs below serve as an example of parts of such an outcome document.

'11. The Commission stresses that "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or

psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The Commission also notes the economic and social harm caused by such violence.

16. The Commission stresses that all States have the obligation, at all levels, to use all appropriate means of a legislative, political, economic, social and administrative nature in order to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls, and must exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish the perpetrators of violence against women and girls and end impunity, and to provide protection as well as access to appropriate remedies for victims and survivors.'

-Commission on the Status of Women, 57th session, 2013-

The member states negotiate about certain meanings of concepts and language used in the document. For example, the quote 'whether occurring in public or in private life' in paragraph 11 is necessary to indicate that violence and rape within a marriage is also an act of violence against women which needs to be prevented and punished by states (paragraph 16). Interests play a part in these negotiations: member states can give in on subjects which they deem less important so they can get more support on subjects which are vital to them.

Some international agreements left a mark on national laws and policies. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for instance, has influenced many national constitutions and is even adopted in some of them (Elkins, Ginsburg and Simmons, 2013). But why do states adhere to recommendations made in international agreements in their policies? Of course it is called an agreement, which means that countries agree with each other that they should and will work on the issues documented in that particular agreement, so it is a formal or informal promise states make. Sometimes agreements are even legally binding. This is the case when an agreement is documented as a treaty (United Nations Human Rights, 2013b). Individuals can bring cases of state violation of rights covered by the treaty to a committee. This committee will analyse if the state actually violated these rights and if this is the case the committee can demand or recommend the implementation of certain procedures and services (Kismödi, Mesquita, Ibañez, Khosla and Sepúlveda, 2012). However, even if the agreement is not documented as a treaty, but 'only' a resolution, convention or declaration and is thus not legally binding, these documents can have a certain influence on national laws and policies. Take the earlier example of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: next to being adopted in national constituencies, it is also used by lawyers or institutions as a tool for (politically) pressuring human rights violating governments (Bernstorff, 2008).

So even though there are no legal obligations to respond to international agreements, many governments still do. Goodman and Jinks (2004) give three categories of reasons why and how states can be influenced to respond to international agreements: coercion, persuasion and acculturation. Coercion takes place when states are pressured by other states or individuals to comply with their wishes. This can be done by pointing out the benefits or rewards when states decide to conform, but also by threatening what will happen if states do not conform. The second category, persuasion, is when other states or individuals persuade the state by explaining why something is so important or beneficial to implement. Persuasion is more about changing minds through substantive arguments than through material rewards or threats, as is the case with coercion. Lastly, acculturation is 'the general process by which actors adopt the beliefs and behavioural patterns of the surrounding culture'(Goodman and Jinks, 2004, 5). A micro-process within this category is identification. The degree to which someone identifies himself with a group determines to what degree this person feels

pressured to conform to the group, may it be real or perceived pressure. This is not just the case with individuals, but also with states. Once a norm is set, framed and institutionalized, states want to conform with them. When women's right to vote was framed as a principle associated with the modern state, other states who identified themselves, or wanted to identify themselves with the modern state also included this right to vote in their constitutions. Power relations play an important role in this: powerful states influence the norms which are institutionalized (Goodman and Jinks, 2004). This can be done on an international level in declarations and conventions. Once the norm is set others want to, or can feel pressured to conform with these norms and include rights and policy recommendations in their national laws and policies.

Gender equality in international agreements
One of the matters discussed in many international agreements is gender equality. In the 1970s women's rights organisations called for an approach on women in development agendas. They argued that the overall agenda was male-biased and there was a need to target women specifically to protect them and give them the same opportunities as men. The United Nations responded to this by organising the International Women's Year in 1975, and at the end of that decade the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted (Cole, 2013). From that point on, a gender perspective was taken along in development agendas. Even though approaches on reaching gender equality and women's empowerment have changed over time, the gender perspective is still included in development agendas and reflected in international agreements. Also the earlier mentioned CEDAW is still one of the most important documents on gender equality and women's empowerment. Other important international agreements on these subjects are the Beijing Platform for Action and Goal 3 ('Promote gender equality and empower women') of the Millennium Development Goals.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is a treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and currently 187 states parties commit to it. The Convention shows the meaning of equality between men and women and how this can be achieved. With this it presents an agenda for action for countries to guarantee the enjoyment of rights for women. Because it is a treaty the Convention sets legally binding obligations for those states parties who ratified it. The implementation of the Convention is monitored by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The states parties need to publish a report of the progress of the implementation of the Convention at least every four years (United Nations Human Rights, 2013a).

The Beijing Platform for Action is a document adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and supported by 189 countries (Women's National Commission, 2013). The Platform for Action 'seeks to promote and protect the full enjoyment of human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life cycle' (United Nations, 1995, pp7). The Platform presents some basic actions with the objective to empower all women and calls upon Governments, international organizations and institutions for commitment. The implementation of the Platform is monitored by the Commission on the Status of Women by annually gathering Member States and reviewing progress in the national and international contexts (United Nations, 1995).

In 2000 the Millennium Development Declaration was adopted and signed by 189 countries. Linked to this Declaration are 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which need to be reached in 2015. Some of the targets have been met, like reducing extreme poverty (United Nations, 2013a), while others lack far behind, like universal access to reproductive health (United Nations, 2013b). Goal 3 specifically targets gender equality and women's empowerment. Furthermore, Goal 5, reduce maternal mortality, is also directly linked to women's rights and all of the MDG target indicators are

disaggregated by sex where possible. At this moment the United Nations is reviewing the MDGs and meanwhile is looking at ways how to set a post-2015 development agenda.

International agreements in policy: Bangladesh and the Netherlands
As already said, governments can decide to include international agreements in their policies and facilitate and stimulate the intended progress reflected in the agreements. Analysing Bangladeshi policy, it becomes clear this is a country which explicitly responds to international agreements in its national policies. Bangladesh signed CEDAW and, because of this, needs to hand in a report to the Committee every four years. In the submitted reports countries need to show the progress they have made concerning the actions and goals stated in the articles of the Convention. When committing to CEDAW in 1984 Bangladesh expressed reservations on article 2, 13.1(a), 16.1(c) and 16.1(f). These articles contradicted with some national laws (Sharia/personal law) concerning equal rights in marriage, divorce, custody, alimony and property inheritance (United Nations, 2003; 2013c). Bangladeshi personal law governs family life and restricts women in exercising their human rights concerning these topics. Restrictions on some of these articles (13.1(a) and 16.1(f)) have been retracted. Withdrawing the last reservations was under 'active review of the government' in 2003 (United Nations, 2003, p10) but in the Sixth and Seventh CEDAW report of 2009 the reservations were still under review (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2009). However, next to these restrictions, Bangladesh reports on many policies and action plans which are put in place to empower women in many aspects of life. The National Policy for Women's Advancements is reflected in the CEDAW report as a response to commitments the Bangladeshi government made:

> 'In carrying forward CEDAW commitments, Government of Bangladesh formulated the National Policy for Advancement of Women in 1997 in the light of the Constitution of Bangladesh, CEDAW Convention, BPFA and broad based consultation with the stakeholders including human rights organizations, women's rights activists, non-Governmental organizations and the civil society'
> -Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2009, 7-

Next to CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and the MDGs are reflected in Bangladeshi national policies. Concerning the Beijing Platform for Action, the government of Bangladesh made a plan in 1998 where the commitments made in Beijing were translated in national action and strategies (United Nations, 2003). It includes strategies to mainstream gender in government policies. The National Policy for Women's Advancement of 1997 was also based on the BPFA. However, this policy was developed but never put into place. It was only in 2011 that such a policy was approved by the government. The government of Bangladesh also commits to the Millennium Development Goals and their achievement in 2015. To reach this the MDGs are included in the Sixth Fifth Year Development Plan of Bangladesh. Furthermore, future policy interventions to reach the MDGs are identified in the Bangladesh MDG Progress Report 2011. Bangladesh foresees to make big improvements on all the goals, except goal 3: Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The future policy intervention given to work on this goal is to implement the earlier mentioned National Policy for Women's Advancement (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2012).

Concerning reflection of these international agreements in Dutch policies, it is most interesting to look into Dutch policy on development cooperation. Gender equality and women's rights is a major focus of the Netherlands in their international development work. However, there is no citing of both CEDAW or the Beijing Platform for Action in the Dutch development cooperation policy. The MDGs

are mentioned a couple of times throughout the policy. No concrete commitments to the MDGs are named in the policy, but in the paragraphs on women's rights and food security it is mentioned that the MDGs have not been reached yet and what the Netherlands is doing to target topics reflected in some MDGs (Rijksoverheid, 2013). Next to the Dutch policy on development cooperation the Fifth periodic report on CEDAW provides information on how the Netherlands is working on their commitments made towards CEDAW, the BPFA and the MDGs. In this periodic report of the Netherlands there is an elaborate description of how the government works to reach the goals of these agreements and on how agreements are incorporated in Dutch policy or strategies. Concerning policy on foreign affairs the reports names seven priority areas to combat discrimination against women which are based on advice of a UN MDG taskforce on gender equality (United Nations, 2008). There is no mentioning of policy developed as a direct response to CEDAW or the BPFA.

Both countries included international agreements in national policies, but their formulation about how they do this is a bit different. Bangladesh is very explicit in pointing out their commitment to certain international agreements, and especially CEDAW and Beijing, by naming what its national responses were and how the agreements are incorporated in national policies. In several reports Bangladesh formulates certain national plans and policies as a reaction to international agreements: as a response to the Beijing Platform for Action a national action plan was developed and the National Policy for Women's Advancement is developed to 'carry forward CEDAW commitments' (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2009, 7). Only in the periodic report it becomes clear Bangladesh has reservations to certain articles of CEDAW because they conflict with personal law, but in all other documents Bangladesh makes strong statements about their commitments to the agreements.

The Dutch formulate it slightly different. They do not explain their policies on gender equality as a direct response to international agreements. Rather they use international agreements (mainly the MDGs) to explain their policy and why they focus on certain topics. For instance, in the paragraph on women's rights in the Dutch development cooperation policy it is first mentioned that MDG3 is not yet reached, then they continue with multiple paragraphs where they present all the measures the Netherlands takes to improve women's rights without explicitly mentioning the MDG again. Also in the Dutch periodic CEDAW report the Netherlands does not talk about certain policies as a response to CEDAW, the BPFA or the MDGs but rather about how their existing policies contribute to these agreements.

Why use international agreements in policy: Bangladesh and the Netherlands
The question remains why the countries included the agreements in their national policies? Of course all these agreements call for actions and give recommendations to improve gender equality and women's rights. In a country like Bangladesh where gender inequality is high there is a big need to work on this. Also the Netherlands identifies a need for focus on this subject in their development cooperation policy. However, next to these good intentions, are there maybe any other reasons why the agreements are taken along in the policies?

Some answers can be found by looking at the earlier mentioned categories of Goodman and Jinks (2004) of reasons why and how states can be influenced to respond to international agreements. Through coercion some countries can positively or negatively stimulate others to comply. For example the US will not provide foreign assistance to countries who violate human rights (Goodman and Jinks, 2004). Bangladesh explicitly shows its commitment and investment in CEDAW in their policy documents. The country also signed the Optional Protocol which provides a legal basis for individuals and groups to file complaints of human rights violations against their governments (United Nations, 2003). In this way Bangladesh shows it tries to prevent violation of human rights in the national

context. This may be a way of Bangladesh to keep their official development assistance (ODA) that they receive in place (World Bank, 2013).

For the Netherlands it is most probably not an issue of financial support since they are the ones providing ODA to countries like Bangladesh and to institutions like the UN. For them it can be a case of acculturation though. As Goodman and Jinks (2004) describe, acculturation has a lot to do with identification. As explained earlier, the degree to which someone identifies himself with a group determines in what degree this person feels pressured, may it be real pressure or imagined pressure. When a norm is set countries want to conform with it. Many states committed to CEDAW and BPFA, and by signing such an agreement and referring to it in national policies countries show they are the ones that actively work on preventing violation of human rights, which is a way to maintain political support.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented answers to the sub question 'how do actors negotiate and shape women's empowerment in international agreements and national policies?'. The chapter describes various reasons why and how negotiations take place and what kind of factors play a role in the outcomes of these negotiations. It shows that interaction between actors is highly important and influential when forming international agreements. The negotiations are a critical point of intersection and, as explained above, in this space power relations, interests and values play a major role in getting to an agreed outcome. Meanings of concepts are literally negotiated and values influence the position taken by states.

Once an outcome is agreed upon, international agreements can be reflected in national policies. Here there is a point of intersection between the agreements made internationally and the national policies in which interests and values again play a role. Reasons for and ways of adopting international agreements in policy vary. Next to taking agreements into consideration to sincerely try to make a change in gender inequality, different ways of translating global language and agreements in policies can help in maintaining financial or political support. The decision to conform to an agreement and to include it in national policy in this example is thus based on interest and power relations. In the space between international agreements and national policy discontinuities between values can also be found. A good example is the case of Bangladesh which does commit to CEDAW, but keeps reservations on certain articles because it contradicts with national laws. The state negotiated in such a way they could commit to this document and possibly maintain financial support, while sticking to its own cultural and social values.

In the next chapter I will make a link between international agreements and national policy with organisations incorporating women's empowerment approaches in their work. What does policy mean for these organisations, how and why do they conform to it and what kind of social interfaces play a role in shaping development interventions on this level? Examples will be given of analysed Dutch and Bangladeshi NGOs partly working on gender equality and women's empowerment.

4. Interests and understandings of NGOs

International agreements concerning gender equality and women's empowerment reflect actions and recommendations for governments and organisations to improve the situation for women in their countries or through their work and stimulate progress in this area. Governments can decide to include these agreements for several reasons and in different policy areas, as is outlined in the previous chapter. NGO's can also respond to international agreements or to national policies which might include aspects of these international agreements. However, NGOs deal with and respond to these policies in their own way, for their own reasons and from their own understandings. Of course the responses can come out of a trust towards these actions and recommendations described in the policies for improving the situation of women, but they can also have other reasons to respond (for example to increase their funding opportunities). The adjustments of NGOs to national policy and international discourse can be reflected in different aspects in the work of NGOs: it can for instance be shown in a change in the framing of the work, the selected target groups or the targets they aim to reach. These responses most likely also influence practice on the ground. Even though it seems that in this way policy fluently trickles down to practice, this is not the case. Interests and knowledges of NGOs that are embedded in social interfaces have their own unique effect on how responses and practices are shaped.

Interviews were conducted and a document analysis was done within several NGOs (Dutch WASH Alliance, Simavi and SLOPB) to see how NGOs can respond to policy on gender equality and women's empowerment, how this might affect projects and practice on the ground and what role social interfaces have. The three researched organisations include aspects of women's empowerment in their water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programmes by focusing on women's participation in decision making bodies concerning WASH. Staff members of these NGOs were interviewed and documents, like year reports, project proposals and strategy papers were analysed. This chapter will outline the main results retrieved from these interviews and document analysis.

Responses to international agreements and national policies
As stated earlier, NGOs can respond to policies because of the trust they have in the ideas the policy is based on and can see it as a way to improve their work. However, responding to policy can also originate from an interest of an NGO to increase their funding possibilities. When the work and strategies of an NGO link to the policies, there is a bigger chance this NGO will receive funding of those donors who place importance to these policies. What needs to be said is that this interest of NGOs to increase funding can be described as a need for survival of the organisation and a continuation of the program, and not so much as a wish for making profit. Still, this interest of an NGO makes it important for them to adjust their work or proposals to international agreements or national policy.

Some national policies are almost compulsory to respond to for an NGO in order to be eligible to receive government funding. This was the case in the Netherlands when in 2009 the government decided to respond to the principle of harmonisation included in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008). The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has four channels through which they aim to reach their goals for development cooperation. One of the channels are NGOs which are funded by MoFA. In 2009 the ministry designed a new funding framework (called MFSII), responding to this Paris Declaration by only providing funds to a couple of alliances instead of supporting many smaller NGO programmes. Because NGOs need to contribute to MoFA's goal, their work has to be in line with MoFA's policy on development cooperation (Rijksoverheid, 2009a). As applicants of MFSII, NGOs need to take this policy into account and reflect it in their proposal to increase their chances to receive funding. Looking at the

previously discussed international agreements on gender equality, CEDAW and Beijing are not explicitly mentioned in the Dutch development cooperation policy of 2009. Reaching the Millennium Development Goals does have an important position in this policy. Thus, if NGOs do want to link their proposals to the Dutch policy it can put them in a favourable position if they respond to this international agreement as well.

Simavi and SLOPB in the new Dutch funding framework
Because of the requirement of forming alliances, organisations working on the same topics started negotiating among each other to link up. Simavi was one of these organisations and found five partners to form the Dutch WASH Alliance (DWA) with. This alliance of six Dutch NGOs works on one broad programme targeting water, sanitation and hygiene issues in eight countries. One of these countries is Bangladesh, where DWA member Simavi supports their local partner SLOPB. Looking at the period when NGOs started to write proposals for MFSII there is no visible response to the Dutch development policy concerning a change in focus within Simavi, apart from forming an alliance. Most aspects of the alliance programme which link to the MDGs already lie in the original values of the organisation. For instance, even though targeting women and eliminating poverty are two main focal points of the MDGs (which are also reflected in the Dutch policy) Simavi already had a specific focus on women and the hard-core poor before the Dutch WASH Alliance was formed.

However, there is a noticeable change in the approach that Simavi takes in their WASH programme after they formed an alliance. This approach is formed at the level of the alliance (not by Simavi itself) and is to be used by all DWA partner organisations. The approach is called the FIETS approach and is created to ensure sustainability of WASH services. By paying attention to five types of sustainability the alliance believes services will 'endure on the long term and can be managed locally' (Dutch WASH Alliance, 2014a). Every letter of FIETS stands for a different type of sustainability: financial, institutional, environmental, technical and social. Even though the approach of FIETS cannot be traced back as a direct response to MoFA's policy of 2009, it was in the time of the new funding framework that this approach was developed. Sustainability is an integral part of the fund application, and organisations get extra points for including sustainability in their programme proposals which increases their chances to receive funding (Rijksoverheid, 2009b). The approach can also be linked to some general themes mentioned in the policy on development cooperation. The expressed needs for a focus on structural social change for the purpose of development and the increase in effectiveness of development work are examples of these general themes. Next to that the policy places importance to involving the private sector and working on the ability of countries to function independently, without the help of others. The five aspects of the FIETS-approach all contribute to these strategies, which makes the approach a valuable addition to the alliance programme and most probably increases the chances of funding from the government of this programme. The FIETS-approach was indeed welcomed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The alliance and the ministry are looking at ways how to apply the FIETS sustainability principles in the broader water sector (Dutch WASH Alliance, 2013).

Next to the change in the approach taken, there was also a change in target numbers. The Dutch WASH Alliance has set high targets concerning the number of people who they will reach with their program. This change is noticeable through some criteria Simavi has formulated for SLOPB about the placement of deep tube wells. Simavi has increased the number of families who should have access to a deep tube well placed by SLOPB. Building a well for 20 families contributes more to a high target than building a well for 2 families. Before 2011 a well could be placed in an area where at least 6 families could make use of the well and after implementing the alliance programme this number grew to over 25 families per well.
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> 'There are some rules for SLOPB concerning providing a deep tube well. There has to be a minimum of 30 to 35 household present in the locality where the well will be placed. There also has to be a distance of at least 1000 feet from another deep tube well.
>
> -Union Health Promoter, Bauphal-

Consequently, the higher number of families who can make use of the well has become a requirement which SLOPB has to follow. For SLOPB this meant a change in selecting areas where a well could be placed. Through this change SLOPB is able to contribute to the higher targets Simavi has set. However, this requirement of Simavi brings some discrepancies in the work of both SLOPB and Simavi. SLOPB accommodates a space where women can express their needs (the committees), but due to the requirement of the higher number of families for placing a deep tube well they cannot always meet those needs. Women who live in more remote areas are denied a deep tube well. Also for Simavi it leads to a discrepancy with their goals: even though women living in remote areas is a target group of Simavi, by applying these conditions of the placement of a deep tube well the needs of women in the most remote areas are not being met.

Setting these higher targets can be explained as a response of the organisations within the WASH Alliance to MoFA's focus on reaching the MDGs. The indicators of the MDGs are formulated in number of people reached. For instance, within MDG 7 (ensure environmental sustainability) a target is formulated as 'Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation' (United Nations Statistics Division, 2014). For SLOPB, providing deep tube wells to larger numbers of families means increasing access to safe drinking water (MDG 7) and can mean a decrease in child and maternal mortality (MDG 4 and 5). By setting higher targets, more people are reached, which means a bigger contribution of Simavi to reaching the MDGs.

The examples of changes in approach and targets shows that through responses of the Dutch WASH Alliance and Simavi to the Dutch policy SLOPB needs to make some changes to their programme. However, SLOPB also has to deal with their own national policy that can have direct influence on their work and focus. SLOPB itself for example, also mentions as an objective in its project proposal 'to develop a community structure for ensuring community led action towards sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices and rights based community resources mobilization for contributing to achieve the national goal for sustainable WASH'. This national goal is a response to the MDGs since the government of Bangladesh committed to reach these goals in their own country (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 2012a). This means SLOPB also wants to contribute to their own national goal and increasing the targets might not only be in the interest of Simavi but also in SLOPB's own interests. However, SLOPB was unclear on how these objectives came about. When asking to SLOPB staff how this proposal was written and how certain activities and objectives were set, responses were that they were set in collaboration with Simavi. I cannot trace back what has been suggested by Simavi and what is developed by SLOPB.

Other Bangladeshi national policy that influences SLOPBs work somehow is related to CEDAW. The government of Bangladesh is actively working on implementing CEDAW actions. As is explained in an earlier chapter, the National Policy for Women's Advancements is a national response to CEDAW. Because of this national policy the government is willing to promote gender issues.

> 'Bangladesh is one of the signatories of CEDAW as well. So by that constitution bindings they have developed this gender policy, women's development policy.

> […] So for example, the government is willing to promote the gender issues,
> therefore we are getting some administrative support from the government officials
> in order to promote these gender issues. So that really helps us in our faith, this
> policy.'
>
>   - Country Coordinator Bangladesh WASH Alliance-

Support from the government means for SLOPB that the local government representatives cooperate in their program by attending several committee meetings and allowing women to let their voice being heard. This effect is not really a response to policy, but more an example of how the national policy can be supportive to SLOPBs work. Other direct responses of SLOPB to changes in Bangladeshi policy were not found.

Knowledges and understandings of social sustainability and women's empowerment
Even though working on gender equality is emphasized in international agreements, reflected in national policies and included in the work and strategies of NGOs, this doesn't mean the ideas on paper are implemented in a direct manner. As has become clear, interests behind responses on these agreements have an influence on practice on the ground. Next to these interests of NGOs, knowledges concerning certain issues might also influence practice on the ground. This means that even though there is policy in place and NGOs adopt these in their own strategies, different understandings around issues reflected in the strategies shape practice in its own way. While everybody might think they are working on the same topic, a difference in understanding around this topic may result in a different implementation of a programme than planned.

    Looking at the project of SLOPB which is supported by Simavi, aspects of the previously mentioned FIETS-approach can be detected. As described earlier, the FIETS-approach is a way to ensure different types of sustainability throughout the programme of the Dutch WASH Alliance. This means SLOPB also needs to integrate this approach in their work and their programme. That is why this approach is reflected in the project proposal for the Sustainable Health and WatSan Development Project of SLOPB which they submitted to Simavi. Simavi even helped SLOPB with their proposal, to make sure the FIETS-approach was included in this proposal. The main aim of the project is to improve water and sanitation practices and access to services through installing local committees in which participants learn about good water and sanitation practices, but also about how to claim their rights concerning water and sanitation in local decision making bodies (see chapter 5 for a more elaborate description of the project). Since women are responsible in their household for collecting safe drinking water, cleaning their houses and keeping their families healthy, these local committees mainly consist of women. Types of sustainability are reflected in different aspects of the project. By involving both women and men in trainings on deep tube well maintenance technical sustainability is partly accommodated. SLOPB now also works on financial sustainability by making the link with financial institutions and providing micro-finance loans. These are new aspects of the project and included because of the requirement to work with the FIETS-approach.

    'Social sustainability refers to ensuring that the appropriate social conditions and prerequisites are realized and sustained so the current and future society is able to create healthy and livable communities' (Dutch WASH Alliance, 2014b). This is the most important type of sustainability when looking at women's empowerment and participation in the project. The DWA also describes its empowerment approach within social sustainability:

> 'Work closely with those who do not have access to WASH to empower
> them to claim their rights to WASH, implying participatory approaches […]
> Development should promote platforms and networks for mobilisations and

support people's ability to take part in governance and claim their rights individually and in groups.'

<div align="right">- Dutch WASH Alliance, 2014b -</div>

This is in line with how Guaraldo Choguill (1996) describes the objective of community organisations: they should not be in place to just improve their own communities, but also need to be able to claim their rights in the political arena and make a sustainable change.

Linking the DWA description with the ladder of participation of Arnstein (1969), the DWA probably strives for forms of participation like partnership (citizens and powerholders negotiate power) and delegated power (citizens achieve a decision making authority). Looking at the steps of Guaraldo Choguill's (1996) ladder her highest hierarchy level of participation, empowerment, fits the DWA description best. She explains participation as a way to empowerment as having a seat in decision-making bodies in order to initiate improvements and influence development (Guaraldo Choguill, 1996). The empowerment step of Guaraldo Choguill's ladder also links with the women's participation aspect in the SLOPB WatSan project proposal. SLOPB already worked with women committees in the past, but with this new emphasis on sustainability they also need to include a focus on building leadership and capacity of women in the project. With this, women can let their voice be heard and claim their rights in local government bodies, even when the project itself comes to an end. Also, with these skills they are able to keep running the committees and spread knowledge about water, sanitation and hygiene practices in their communities. Looking at SLOPB's project proposal their ideas and plans concerning social sustainability match with those described by the Dutch WASH Alliance.

Comparing the proposal with implementation and practices concerning social sustainability some discrepancies can be found. A sustainable project is meant to last after the project period is over and money flows to the project will stop. Ideas on continuation of the groups differed among participants. Some women wanted to continue after SLOPB has to stop the project.

> I: So will you run the community groups and the ward committee?
> R: Yes. Both. We can also provide a deep tube well to who has no tube well.
> I: How will you do that without SLOPB?
> R: We will go to the Union Parishad[3] or other NGO's.
> I: Ok, uhm. How can you go to the Union Parishad ?
> R: I went to the Union Parishad. Then the Chairman[4] gave me a tube well and I took a training about how to repair a tube well.

<div align="right">-Community group female member, Dumki-</div>

This is what SLOPB intended in the project and is in line with the description of social sustainability. However, most interviewees did not mention the possibility to keep running the project so that they could claim their rights. Instead, they wanted to continue the project so they could spread their knowledge in the community. Spreading this knowledge of course has its merits and in this way the project might become sustainable in its awareness raising component. However, the intention of the project is to also be sustainable in a way that women can claim their own rights, so concerning this component the project will probably not be successful. With this awareness raising and spreading the knowledge SLOPB covers one part of social sustainability as explained by the Dutch WASH Alliance but leaves out another crucial aspect (possibility to claim rights). A factor which increases the chances of failure in this aspect is that many women were only involved in the community group (instead of in

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[3] Government decision making level.
[4] Government representative leading the Union Parishad.

all levels of committees) and did not know what happened in the other groups. These other groups are direct links to government representatives and crucial to ensure social sustainability. Missing this link means women miss the opportunity to learn a way of how to stand up for their rights.

When asking SLOPB staff about this it became clear they see social sustainability more as the continuation of the project for the sake of the spread of knowledge on services and practices concerning water and sanitation instead of the ability of women to claim their rights in local (governmental) decision making bodies. A response to my question about what the intended results of working with the committees are, was that people could become aware of health practices and become more healthy. The concept of women's empowerment in this project was explained by SLOPB staff as the empowerment of women through providing deep tube wells so they did not have to walk long distances anymore, or by setting up a satellite clinic so all women were able to get some sort of medical care. This does cover some aspects of women's empowerment, but it leaves out other important aspects: the empowerment of women so they can claim their rights themselves.

I also noticed this lack of focus on rights of SLOPB in my observations in the committee meetings. For three months I observed in 15 committee meetings and in all those meetings not once women's rights were discussed, or any human rights at all. In an interview with a Project Officer of SLOPB it became clear that SLOPB staff might interpret claiming rights a bit different as well.

> 'They [women] have some rights in the Union Parishad. Sometimes they have rights in government relief, relief for our poorest people. But some poor people do not know that they have the right for this relief. […]Now they know they have the right.'
>
> -Project Officer SLOPB, Bauphal-

What is meant in this quote is that some women have a right to small financial support or they can get a bag of rice from different government departments. In the committees rights like these are discussed but SLOPB staff does not touch upon human rights like the right to have access to safe drinking water or that women have the same rights as men have. Knowledge about these rights would give the women a certain power to advocate for those rights which are not practiced yet. These are the rights that the Dutch WASH Alliance means when talking about knowledge on rights and increasing women's voice (Dutch WASH Alliance, 2014b).

Even though women are meant to be involved in the group so they can increase their social power (according to the proposal and in line with the definition of social sustainability), the definition of women's participation that SLOPB gave does not necessarily lead to an increase in power of these women. For SLOPB staff participation could mean attending a meeting, talking or just listening in that meeting and agreeing with the discussion. But there were also very different interpretations of women's participation:

> 'Another one [way of participation] is maybe that we are organising a community meeting. One woman is participating so inviting other people and organising all these things. Another one is participating like, whenever the meeting is organised in the courtyard maybe two households are participating. To be able to sit there in the courtyard they need some mats so they also give some mats. Whenever if they need some water for drinking, some people are organising drinking water for the people who are sitting together. This is all some kind of participation.'
>
> - Director SLOPB-

Next to making their courtyards available and collecting drinking water for the group, contributing some money for a deep tube well was also seen as participation.

Comparing these descriptions of women's participation with the earlier explained ladders of participation they best fit in the steps of informing and consultation of Arnstein (1969) and diplomacy of Guaraldo Choguill (1996). Participants are informed about health practices and rights (although not the rights Simavi aims to share) and they get the chance to speak and contribute to the discussion. In the description of participation of SLOPB staff nothing is reflected about making decisions, claiming rights or holding government accountable. The descriptions of participation concerning collecting water or making a courtyard and mats available does not match any step on the ladder, so cannot be ranged as participation of any kind in these frameworks. Even though the aim of the project (on paper) is to empower women and give them a stronger voice by meaningful participation, understandings about this concept clearly differ. This can lead to different outcomes of the project than intended.

These differences in understanding and interpretation of social sustainability and specifically women's participation may result in certain outcomes not being reached. The Dutch WASH Alliance does measure the progress in reaching the targets of the programme, also on women's participation. However, the way it is measured will not help in identifying problems concerning these interpretations of social sustainability. This is because the WASH Alliance measures women's participation by collecting the numbers of women involved in committees. SLOPB reports to Simavi about how many women were present in the three different committees they organised, and Simavi gathers all the numbers of their partners in Bangladesh. This total number of women involved in committees is reported back to the Dutch WASH Alliance, which gathers these numbers from over 60 partner organisations in 8 countries. These outputs are compared with the numbers that were initially set per year by the alliance (the targets) for this specific indicator. If the outputs meet this initial number the target is reached or even exceeded.

This way of measuring women's participation leaves out the quality of their participation, the way they might be empowered and how this contributes to social sustainability. There is no specific attention to how these women were exactly involved in committees and how social sustainability is ensured in practice. However, because of the way women's participation is measured and reported back to the Dutch WASH Alliance the social sustainability aspect can still be named a success. The number of women involved in the committee is seen as the number of women who are actively participating in the project, which is a result by itself. Next to that there are a few success stories of women who worked their way up and were elected as a government representative. These examples are used as stories behind the numbers. In this way of reporting about results, which the donor (the ministry of Foreign Affairs) agrees with, there is enough space to identify successes even though practice does not match approaches and strategies the organisations claim they use.

Conclusion
It is difficult to connect international agreements directly with the strategies, approaches or programmes of NGOs, but what has become clear is that the social interface between NGOs and national policies is important to note. NGOs respond to and are influenced by values and recommendations of international agreements that national policymakers incorporate in their policy. An example is the formation of alliances corresponding to certain values in the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda or the requirement set by Simavi concerning targeting more families per deep tube well corresponding with reaching certain MDGs. Here NGOs can negotiate for themselves to what extent they want to change their work and possibly affecting their strategies or values, in order to be eligible to receive funding. Looking at the situation of Simavi they did not have to change much to fit the policy discourse and increase their chances to funding.

Power relations also play a role in the responses of NGOs to the Dutch policy and to the Bangladeshi policy. Changes in approach and targets of the Dutch WASH Alliance link to themes and agreements as reflected in the Dutch policy. Concerning the Bangladeshi policy SLOPB staff was pointing out how this policy could help them in the implementation of their programme, rather than that they responded to this policy by changing their work somehow. SLOPB did have to respond to the changes concerning approach and targets made by Simavi and the Dutch WASH Alliance. So the Dutch policy has a more clear influence on strategies and practice of those NGOs than Bangladeshi policy. This might be explained by the different roles the two countries have in the work of the NGOs. The Netherlands is a donor for the NGOs, while they do not receive much from the Bangladeshi government in terms of financial support.

Looking at how the NGOs shape the design and implementation of women's empowerment and participation themselves it has become clear that different understandings about concepts shape practice and outcomes. The Dutch WASH Alliance elaborately describes social sustainability in their FIETS-approach. However, looking at the practices and interpretations of SLOPB staff, ideas about this concept differ. SLOPB does work on some aspects of social sustainability and women's rights but because of the difference in understanding social sustainability is not reached in the way the Dutch WASH Alliance envisioned it. Next to that, ideas concerning women's participation differ. When placing descriptions of women's participation of the DWA and the SLOPB project proposal on paper with the earlier mentioned ladders of participation they fit with descriptions like partnership, delegated power and empowerment. SLOPB staff descriptions of participation however, fit more with participation forms of informing, consultation and diplomacy. So also here the vision of the Dutch WASH Alliance is not something that is imposed on passive humans. Instead SLOPB shapes and uses it in accordance with staff's own understandings and context.

So how do actors negotiate and shape the design and implementation of women's empowerment and participation? Organisations respond in a certain way to international agreements and national policies while sticking to their own approaches and values. The existence of a reaction of an NGO to policy is dependent on what kind of (financial) power the government has. Next to that, actors shape design and implementation of project according to their own understandings. If there is a difference in understandings concerning concepts between cooperating NGOs this can influence implementation of a project significantly. This chapter mainly focussed on the role of the organisations in relation to each other and to international agreements and national policy in shaping design and implementation of projects. In the next chapter I will answer the same question, but there the focus while lie on the specific local context of rural Bangladesh in which these organisations operate.

5. Women's empowerment in rural Bangladesh

The previous chapters illustrated that social interfaces shape practices at different levels. Interests and understandings can shape policy, strategies and projects. These social interfaces at 'higher' meso and macro levels shape practice on the ground, but also social interfaces at the micro level have their own specific influence on the implementation and outcomes of projects. Local values, power relations and interest all influence the way a project turns out. In this chapter the focus will lie on how actors negotiate and shape the design and implementation of interventions on women's empowerment and participation in the Bangladeshi context. The previously described WatSan project of SLOPB in Bangladesh is used as a research project and as an example to show how social interfaces play a role at this level and how they can influence a project. To create a good understanding of the project I will start with an explanation of SLOPB, their WatSan project and the way participants are involved in this. Then I will continue with presenting how people became participants and what influenced this selection process. After that I will elaborate on gender and hierarchy within Bangladesh and how this influences women's participation in the WatSan project.

The project
Social interfaces are researched within the Sustainable Health and Water and Sanitation Development Project (WatSan project) run by SLOPB (Stichting Land Ontwikkelings Project Bangladesh) and the context in which it is implemented. SLOPB's mission is to help provide essential services in remote areas for improved health, and to promote grassroots organizations for economic empowerment of the target groups. The WatSan project has several objectives, but the objectives most relevant to women's empowerment and participation are 'to develop a community structure for ensuring community led action towards sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices and rights based community resources mobilization for contributing to achieve the national goal for sustainable WASH' and 'to build community capacity on WASH, leadership & gender development, adolescent sex and reproductive health rights towards ensuring community participation and their empowerment to ensure their access and rights to WASH'.

To reach these objectives SLOPB has set up community groups in which participants can learn and speak up about the improvement of health and sanitation facilities and activities in their areas. The members of these groups are the poor, who are selected on the basis of certain selection criteria of SLOPB. Because women have important tasks concerning water and sanitation in the household, they have a prominent role in the project. Women's knowledge of water and sanitation practices is built in the groups, and they are asked to spread this knowledge in their families and in the community. Furthermore, opportunities for women are created to share their needs in local government meetings so they can claim their rights concerning water and sanitation themselves. To make sure that the needs of all the communities can be shared with the local government representatives three different groups are in place. The first group on the lowest level is the community group which discusses problems faced in the smaller community. Each community group sends two representatives to the second group, the Ward (village) committees, where they can discuss their problems with others and look for solutions. Each Ward committee also selects a representative for the third group, the Union committee, where the problems are discussed with government representatives. Figure 2 is a visualisation of this structure. By building this structure of groups and committees SLOPB tries to work on a sustainable solution for WASH problems in which communities know their way to governmental decision making bodies to tackle their problems. This links to the social sustainability in the FIETS-approach of the Dutch WASH Alliance which is discussed in the previous chapter.

Figure 2: Structure of groups and committees of SLOPB
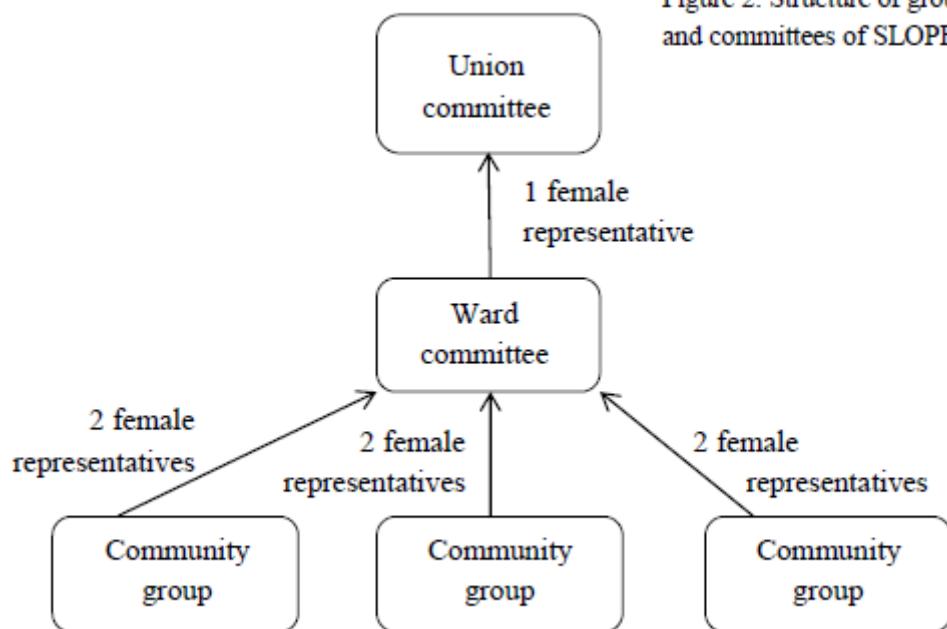
By doing observations in the meetings and interviewing members of the groups and committees I tried to get a sense of this project and the way women were involved in and empowered by it. In this chapter I will walk through my findings and ideas on the selection of participants, reasons to participate, the way members participate in the project and how all of this shapes the implementation and outcomes of the project.

Becoming a participant

For every group SLOPB has set up there was a specific process to select participants. Within the selection process three selection stages can be identified. The first stage is the selection of two women in the community to become the first members of a community group. It starts with a visit of the Union Health Promoter (SLOPB staff) to a local government representative, the Union Parishad (UP) member. The Union Health Promoter (UHP) explains the project to the UP member and then the UP member gives a list with names of women in the community who are fitted to join the community group according to him. Both himself and the UHP visit these women and see if they fit the criteria set by SLOPB and if these women are interested. Criteria of SLOPB are that women need to be poor, accepted in the community, able to receive technical trainings and spread knowledge in the community. In practice this means that UHP's and UP members look at someone's popularity, if a woman does not have young children, if the husbands agree and if the selected women are smart enough. If this is the case the visited women are invited to join the community group.

In the first selection stage the interests of the UP member can play a role in who he selects for the committee. The UP member is elected by the community and has a front seat in Union committee meetings where he and his community can get some benefits from. In order to be elected the UP member needs sufficient support from members of his community. SLOPB community groups are seen by many members as a way to obtain a deep tube well. This is also a reason most of the women pointed out to join a community group. When the UP member invites certain women it can be seen as him doing them a favour by giving them a chance to obtain a deep tube well. This means it can be in the interest of the UP member to invite certain people and in this way increase political support.

28

In the second stage of selection the two women selected first need to select 23 other participants to form a community group. A complete group consists of 25 members: 10 couples and 5 'disabled people'. Even though criteria for selecting other members were not always clear, women used their own criteria to select participants for their group. Criteria that were mentioned in the interview were the ability to easily understand the trainings, good verbal skills and having enough spare time. Women invited family members, friends, neighbours and acquaintances who met their criteria.

> I: So then how did you select those persons?
> R: After completing the meeting I told them I need some women who have time, who are free, who have no baby on their lap, who can speak nicely. Then also some men and women helped me to select the other 5 volunteer women [the 'disabled' group]. In this way I selected them. Also there were some women who were interested but they had some problems. They had no time on their hands because they have a little child. That's why we selected others.
>
> -Union committee female member, Dumki-

Then there were also some women who were more likely to become part of the committee because each committee needed to include 5 'disabled people'. I went to many committee meetings, but did not see any disabled people. I know one cannot always see disabilities immediately, but I started to wonder if SLOPB or maybe even Bangladeshi people in general have a different understanding than I have about disabled people. I asked my translator, who was a Bangladeshi student, and she was wondering the same thing. Because we both did not know what disabled constituted I assumed the different view on disabled people was not a general Bangladeshi conception. To see how SLOPB staff thought of this we started to ask them what they understood as disabled people and we found out that in their category of disabled people in the committees fall more kinds of 'disabled' people than I thought. Next to medically disabled people, like blind, deaf or crippled women, widows and young or unmarried girls also fall under this category. An 18-year old girl from Bauphal told me that her age was the reason she was invited for the community group. She could fill the spot of those 5 disabled people. I realised that instead of strictly including disabled people the 5 reserved seats are for what I call 'vulnerable groups'. Since Simavi's work needs to target vulnerable groups it is not that surprising there are reserved seats for them.

The third stage of selection is choosing representatives within the community group to attend the Ward committee and a representative from the Ward committee for the Union committee. The intention of SLOPB is that within both the community group and the Ward committee the whole group chooses a female representative and that these representatives change every three months. The actual process of selection differed a lot per group. Some community groups only chose the women who were selected by the UP member and the UHP in the first selection stage as their representatives. Some Ward committees consist of women who are not members of a community group at all, so they are not representing a community group in the committee. There were also members of a community group who did not know the Ward committees, while other people in their group did know about the Ward committee. In these cases probably not the whole group decides about their representatives. These issues leave a mark on the social sustainability and women empowerment aspect of the project. The layers of committees and representatives are put in place so a group of rural women can have a voice in government decision making bodies. By ignoring one of these layers, for example if women in the Ward committee are not representing a community group, certain groups are left out and this impairs their empowerment.

Some groups do however make a decision together on who to send to a higher level committee.

> I: But how do you select people from your group to go to the ward committee?
> R: In a community group there are 25 members. But the selection will be held randomly. We will pick someone in the room or someone who is good in his or her behaviour. Also I select those persons who have the ability to change a decision or who have good ideas.
>
> -Community group female member, Bauphal-

Characteristics that a selected person should have that have been mentioned in the interviews are being a good and responsible person, having the ability to speak fluently, having good ideas, being able to travel and being able to make time for the meetings. The criteria of being able to travel has a high impact on the selection. Higher committee meetings are often further away, which means more travel time for the participants. Bangladeshi women who are allowed to travel generally have a better position at home and in society than those who are not allowed to travel. Also criteria like speaking fluently and having good ideas have to do with the education level of the women. Looking at all the criteria the women have set for choosing a representative it seems that those with a better position are usually selected.

The other side of selecting women is the willingness of these women to join the groups. The women who were invited to join the groups are all poor rural women. Most of them are busy with their household and are in need of extra money. This project requests an investment in the time of these poor women without having a direct financial benefit in return. Women still accepted to be participants in the groups. In the interviews women all responded the same to my differently formulated questions of how the project benefited them, or what the advantages were of being a member: they all told me that there were no financial benefits. After asking more and different questions about reasons for participation the main reason shared was that they joined the committee to make a change in their community. They believe that through the knowledge that they gain and spread, they themselves, their families and their community will become cleaner and healthier. The knowledge they mention focuses on knowledge concerning clean water, sanitation and hygiene. Some also saw a financial benefit in this: if they live healthier lives their families will save money on medicine. Next to benefiting the community through knowledge, many members see the groups as an opportunity to receive a deep tube well. In the groups the needs of the community for deep tube wells are identified and some are provided by SLOPB if they match certain criteria. However, there is a limited number of deep tube wells, so it is not a guarantee that members receive a deep tube well when joining a group or committee. SLOPB identified this as a problem: once members realised they could not get a deep tube well some of them dropped out of the groups.

Becoming a healthier family or community and receiving a deep tube well were the two main reasons for joining that members mentioned in the interviews. These were also the main benefits shared by the UHP's and UP members when informing possible members about the groups in the first and second selection stage. Among the respondents there were some exceptions who mentioned different reasons to join the group. A few women joined because of the 50 Taka (€0.50) they receive for travel costs to every meeting. Other women also mentioned the 50 Taka but did not see it as a main reason for joining the committee and stated they would also be committee members without receiving the money. One other woman saw the group as an opportunity to improve her business:

> R: I joined this group because I was interested.
> I: Why were you interested to be a member?

R: I like to do this work as aTBA [trained birth assistant]. If I joined this group then my popularity would increase. I can come in contact with more people.

-Community group female member, Dumki-

Next to these reasons to gain personal or community benefits, social pressure might also be a reason to join the committee. Poor rural women place themselves in a lower social position than the UHP and the UP member. Respecting people in a higher social position is an important value to retain. The UHP is an educated woman who is able to travel by herself in rural areas. The UP member is most of the times a man who is elected by the community and has some sort of political power. If one of those persons invites a poor rural woman or man to join a community group it is experienced as impolite to reject the invitation.

I: Uhm, and, why did you become a member ?
R: They [the UHP and a volunteer] advertised that if I joined with them they will give me a latrine or a deep tube well. We are so poor, so we also want to take that benefits. And even more also, if anybody invited us, how can we skip that invitation? You invited me and that's why I am here.

-Community group female member, Dumki-

This is even more the case if the UP member is a man who invites a woman. Both status and gender influence the response of the invitee. Reasons to become a member vary among women, but some women might have been pushed to join through this value of hierarchy.

In the women's decision to become a participant certain points of intersection between actors are interesting to note here. For a woman to become a participant she has several power relations and interests she has to take into account. In order to make a decision she has to weigh issues against each other like the respect she want to show to the UP member by accepting his offer, her responsibilities in household tasks she needs to manage, the possibility to receive a deep tube well and the chance to build networks in the committee to improve her business. Her parents, husband and parents in law also weigh these aspects against each other and also need to decide if they accept that the woman will travel by herself to the committees. So within this intersection between actors different interests, power relations, hierarchy and gender roles are negotiated before all involved come to a decision for the woman to join a group.

Influences of gender and hierarchy on participation
Once women accepted the invitation to join a meeting and become participants of a community group they are expected to attend the meetings, listen to the lectures given and spread the knowledge. The women receive information about topics that SLOPB decides upon and do not have a say in what topics are being discussed.

I: Who decides upon the topics that are discussed during in the meeting?
R: The UHP decides on the topic. She calls me one day before the meeting to share where and when the meeting will be held and then she also shares the discussion topics.

-Community group female member, Bauphal-

Empowerment approaches are based on the belief that marginalized people (the poor, women, etc.) are the ones who can and also want to make a change in their lives and bring about development

(Narayan, 2002). However, here there is an external force involved (SLOPB) which empowers the women and also decides in what way and within what topics they should be empowered.

However, the women do get the chance to have an active role in the committees as well. Women who represent the groups in the Union committee can share the identified problems with the Union Parishad chair. This person is part of the local government and has influence on how the budget for water and sanitation in his Union is spent. This gives the women a chance to claim their rights concerning water and sanitation and hold the government responsible. By teaching women how they can reach local government officials they can still try to arrange a deep tube well even when SLOPB stops the project. This contributes to the social sustainability of the project which is explained in the previous chapter.

The project's focus on building the capacity and voice of women is expected to build women's empowerment and contribute to gender equality. As set out in the introduction of this thesis working on gender equality is necessary in Bangladesh. The country has a patriarchal culture in which men generally have a higher status than women. The obedience to men was noticeable in the stories of women about how they got involved in the project. Asking the women to join a community group is also asking them to leave their household jobs for a couple of hours per month and to do this they needed permission of their husbands. Sometimes the UHP came to help and tried to convince the husbands of the benefits of the group. Next to that, there were drop-outs in a few groups or committees. This had several reasons, but in some cases the husbands' opinion had to do with it:

> 'An old volunteer left the meeting because when she came here some problems happened in her household activities, then her husband said that there is no need to go there because it is not a job or it has no financial benefits, so why would you go there? I know where she lives, but it is far away and so muddy, you cannot go'.
>
> -Ward committee female member, Dumki-

Later I visited the woman referred to in this quote (it was indeed a very muddy road), and she confirmed that her husband told her not to go. She just got a baby and it took her a long time to get to the meeting.

To deal with this difference between men and women, the project also includes men in the community groups. Each community group needs to have ten couples, so the selected married women need to bring their husbands. In this way men can experience the benefits of the group themselves, and by attending the lectures they can understand why certain changes have to be made. By this, women do not need to explain themselves again at home and go through a lot of effort to convince their husbands to change practices and to save some money for a sanitary latrine. However, during my visits to the community groups I noticed there were not so many men present. In the interviews with the women I asked about their absence and the women stated the men were sometimes in the meeting, but that at the moment they were busy with their jobs. The meeting times were adjusted to the schedules of the women, but not to the schedules of the men in the groups.

I experienced the difference between the status and roles of men and women myself during my research as well. When conducting an interview with a woman sometimes men walked in. I could never continue my interview because the interviewee always fell totally silent and the men took over the conversation. My translator would not send them away or explain them that we are in the middle of an interview because that was experienced as very rude of a young woman to say to a man. Also when introducing myself everybody asked me if I was married. They did not show much interest in what I was doing in Bangladesh, but they were very interested in what my 'fiancée' did for a living and when he was coming to Bangladesh. When I met people that I already knew they always asked me

how my fiancée was doing, before they asked me how I was doing. This was not just something that men did, also the women asked me those questions.

Next to gender, values concerning hierarchy seem to have a prominent influence on the way of participation of women in the groups and committees. People with a higher social status need to be shown respect. This means that during a meeting those with a high social status could sit in front of the group on a nice chair next to the fan. I experienced this sensitivity towards hierarchy especially during the Union committee and through my translator. We always got the good chairs next to the most important men of the meeting (the UP chair) because I was a guest from abroad and my translator had to sit next to me for translation. She was not a shy woman, but when we walked into a Union committee she always turned red and said she felt so awkward sitting in front of the whole group. One time a UP member asked my translator to be quiet and she immediately granted his request and stopped translating. I had to wait one hour without translation before the meeting was over and I could ask her what happened. Also I experienced the way people deal with hierarchy during an interview with a SLOPB employee. We were talking about the project, but then a colleague walked in. My respondent fell silent, and his colleague set down and started to answer the question that I just asked. Once his colleague left the room my respondent started talking again. Later I found out his colleague had a higher position in SLOPB than my respondent had.

Both gender and hierarchy have an influence on the participation of women in the groups, which limits the women's active role in the committees. There was an observable difference in the way the women behaved between the groups and committees. In the community groups and in most Ward committees women spoke freely, both old and young within the topics set by SLOPB. However, in the Union committees where government representatives are present, their involvement in the discussion changed. In the Union committees the seating arrangement was according to status. In the front of the room was a table where the Union Parishad chair had its seat, together with some colleagues of his. My translator and I also always got a seat at this table. Then in front of us were the Union Parishad members, both male and female. Behind them were the male villagers who wanted to attend the meeting. All the way in the back were the female representatives from the community groups and Ward committees. In the Union committees the UHP shared the needs of the community and the female representatives from those communities just sat in the back and talked when they were spoken to, which was not often.

I: Ok. And what do you do during such a [Union committee] meeting?
R: Just listen.
-Ward committee female member, Dumki-

Comparing the level of participation that I observed and heard about in my interviews with the ladders of participation of Arnstein (1969) and Guaraldo Choguill (1996) it becomes clear that they fit in the middle steps of the ladders. It differs per committee or group, because there are different possibilities in making decisions and claiming rights in each group. The level of participation of the community groups and the Ward committees lies in the steps of informing and consultation, degrees of tokenism as described by Arnstein (1969). This means that participants do get information, mainly about hygiene practices but also about their role in the project, and they are asked for input on where they think a deep tube well should be placed. However, they do not have real power to make or influence the decision, because these decisions are supposed to be made in the higher level Union committee meeting. When looking at these Union committee meetings however, the women representatives present are not actively involved in decision making or get any speaking time. The participation level in this committee meeting is therefore also placeable no higher than consultation (Arnstein, 1969) or diplomacy (Guaraldo Choguill, 1996). Consultation and diplomacy take place

when the women are invited in the committee meeting and are allowed to give a short answer to one or two questions about placing a deep tube well, but without having the power to co-decide about the placement. Sometimes the UHP takes the stage during the Union committee meeting to make a statement about the needs of the women in the groups. This can be seen as some form of advice towards the government. In a way this can be placed in the participation level of placation (Arnstein, 1969) or dissimulation (Guaraldo Choguill, 1996) in which participants are able to give an advice but again do have no formal power to make a decision about it. Also, because it is not the women themselves but SLOPB staff who speaks on behalf of them I do not think this is 'real' placation. Arnstein or Guaraldo Choguill only explain citizen participation as citizen themselves or representatives from the community groups participating in decision making. They do not include external representatives in their ladder or rungs.

Conclusion

In this chapter I tried to answer the question of how actors negotiate and shape the design and implementation of interventions on women's empowerment and participation. The criteria that both SLOPB as well as the committee participants set for those becoming a committee member or representative obviously have an influence on which women are able to participate. For SLOPB all involved women need to meet the criteria of being poor and there are some reserved spaces for women who are generally marginalized in Bangladeshi culture (unmarried women, widows and disabled people). Once in the committee the participants set their own criteria in the selection processes of choosing representatives. The selected women are mainly women with time on their hands (so no small children and no major household tasks), who are allowed to travel by themselves and who are capable to present the issues of the group. So even though SLOPB has set criteria to ensure that marginalized people are targeted, the women in the committees make their own selection based on skills women have, which can mean that the most marginalized are still excluded to a certain degree.

What also became apparent from the research data is that the ability to participate and the level of participation are shaped by specific gender roles and hierarchy that lie in Bangladeshi culture. Different actors (women, their husbands, UP members, UHPs and family members) communicate and negotiate over the possibility of women to become part of a committee and to become a representative of a committee. This influences the way the women are empowered through the project. Some women are restricted to join a committee or to become a representative at higher committee levels. This restricts their opportunity to raise their voice and claim their rights and in turn diminishes the level in which they can be empowered through the project. When a husband or a family member of the woman not allows her to go to join a committee the UHP tries to negotiate with the family and point out the benefits of becoming a participant in the project. From the interviews it became clear that benefits pointed out to the families did not mention claiming rights but were more directed on benefits like receiving a deep tube well or living healthier lives. Without a stronger focus on the fundamental themes of empowerment and meaningful women's participation within the project, the objectives concerning building leadership and social sustainability will be hard to reach.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

In this thesis social interfaces were analysed to see how actors shape women's participation in Bangladeshi and Dutch development policy, interventions and practice. What has become clear is that while global development strategies are negotiated, policies are shaped, programmes are designed and projects are implemented, there are many points of interaction between actors. Within the interactions interests, values and understandings influence these processes and make it impossible for policy to fluently trickle down to practice. Instead, actors manoeuvre between policy and practice; they adjust and use it for their own benefit or within their understanding.

Using policy
In order to answer my research question I first looked at how interactions between actors at the macro and meso level shape women's empowerment in international agreements and national policies. Analysing Dutch and Bangladeshi policy in the light of social interfaces it becomes clear that mainly interest and power relations are a driving force to commit to international agreements. Bangladesh is a recipient country and has an interest in maintaining financial support. Therefore they explicitly commit to international agreements concerning gender equality in their national policy, increasing their chances for financial support from governments or international institutions. The Netherlands is not responsive like Bangladesh, instead they use international agreements in their national policy to legitimize their own development policy and interventions. Governments can do this to show their support to global development agendas and in this way maintain political support. Furthermore, committing to international agreements can strengthen the identity the Dutch label themselves with. The Netherlands is a donor country and, as explained in chapter 3, they might identify themselves with a modern welfare state which is capable of providing development aid.

Responding to international agreements thus brings some benefits for both Bangladesh and the Netherlands. Other actors in the meso level in turn use national policy for their own benefits. It was clear that in 2009 Dutch NGOs committed to the national policy by forming alliances because it was a way to maintain governmental financial support. The development of the FIETS-approach and the increase in targets of the WASH Alliance linking to the MDGs are other ways of these actors to use policy for their own interests. By showing initiative on developing an approach on sustainability they not only increased their chances for funding but also increased the power and influence the WASH Alliance has in the Dutch governments' approach concerning water.

Responses like this by the Bangladeshi NGO in relation with their national policy were not found. This difference in response to Dutch and Bangladeshi policy might be explained through the interests of NGO's and the roles of the government. The Dutch government in this case has a donor role while the government of Bangladesh is not financially supporting or targeting (local) NGOs. Adjusting to the Dutch policy is a matter of increasing the odds to maintain financial support, while adjusting to the Bangladeshi policy doesn't make a difference for the organisations in terms of finance and support.

These examples point out that international agreements, national policy and organisational strategies intersect with each other because of interests and roles of actors involved. It can be to keep power relations in place or to maintain or increase their chance to receive financial support. Either way, consequences are that international agreements are reflected in both national policy as well as in development interventions in a way that it is somehow beneficial for those involved. This is in line with arguments by Mosse (2004) and Arce (1999) who claim that it is important to frame and translate a project in a way it matches the policy discourse. In this way actors keep control over their own projects and needs, while getting the most benefits from national and international policies.

Empowerment and participation
After looking at interactions between actors on and between the macro and meso level I turned my focus to the question of how actors negotiate and shape the design and implementation of interventions on women's empowerment and participation, which is mainly on and between the meso and micro level. As set out in chapter 2, empowerment is a relational concept which means it is shaped by interactions between 1) those who are being empowered and those who are trying to stimulate empowerment and between 2) those who are being empowered and their environment.

Within the project of SLOPB there is not one party who can be placed under 'those who are trying to stimulate development' but two: SLOPB and Simavi in the Dutch WASH Alliance. One main issue which came forward from my data is that a difference in understanding between these actors about fundamental concepts within the project has a huge effect on its implementation. The WASH Alliance envisions a project that ensures social sustainability with a focus on empowerment of women so they can claim their rights, but SLOPB only addresses sustainability in awareness raising in the communities. Therefore there is a lack of focus on capacity building in claiming rights and on setting up (complete) systems to participate in decision making. This also has its effect on women's participation in the project. Looking at the ladder of participation of Arnstein (1969) and Guaraldo Choguill (1996) it is evident that the DWA and SLOPB strive for different types of participation. The DWA strives for higher forms on the ladders which can be placed in partnership, delegated power and empowerment. In SLOPBs project proposal it matches these forms of participation but in practice it fits better in lower forms on the ladder such as informing, consultation and diplomacy. Empowering people means bringing about a shift in power relations between those without power and the powerful (Narayan, 2002). These lower forms of participation do not reach that.

Interactions between those who are being empowered and those who bring empowerment also add to what empowerment looks like. Looking at the relation between SLOPB and the women in the committees, 'the ones who bring empowerment' are the biggest decision makers. In the project of SLOPB it were not the women who initiated the committees, who came up with discussion topics or who demanded change. Instead, the project was already designed by SLOPB and women were persuaded to get involved with promises of deep tube wells and latrines or felt pressured by invitations of UP members due to the sensitivity to hierarchy. Within the interactions between SLOPB and the women a motivation or obligation of these women to join the committee (feeling pressured or receiving a deep tube well) is created which does not match the reasons the DWA has for empowering women (giving them a voice to claim their rights themselves). However, in this project participation is indeed more effective with the help of external support (in this case SLOPB) as Guaraldo Choguill claims (1996). Without this external help there would be no participation at all.

There is also the interaction between those who are being empowered and their environment. In the three months I conducted my research it was very clear that cultural values had a huge impact on the role of the participants in the project. The sensitivity to hierarchy was noticeable in every person I spoke to. Everybody takes their position and suited role within society. Next to hierarchy, the unequal position of women in Bangladeshi society (especially in the rural areas) plays a big role in how their empowerment and participation turns out in practice. Women need to get permission from their husbands to become participants and they sit in the back of the meeting rooms where they do not get any relevant speaking time. All of this makes it almost impossible for them to meaningfully participate in the committees and to ensure social sustainability in this project.

Space between policy and practice
What has become clear is that actors negotiate over interest, values and understandings within policy and practice generally in a way that they can utilize it. A good example here is how Bangladesh deals with CEDAW article 2, which contradicts with existing laws in Bangladesh. By committing to

CEDAW but also keeping reservations on certain articles, the country is able to stick to its own national values and at the same time commit to agreements and maintain international support. It not only shows that actors try to maintain their own values, but also that it is possible to commit to a very important document on gender equality while having laws in place that hinder gender equality. These kind of negotiations are possible because agreements and policies are vague and very general: it makes them interpretable in different ways. The vagueness of policy leaves room for actors to manoeuvre between policy and practice. Another example that fits here are the differences in understandings concerning social sustainability. The effects of these understandings on the actual practices on the ground are not that notable in the documented outcomes. The way the results of the programme are measured only reflects the number of women involved in the project, not how meaningful their involvement is. As long as the WASH Alliance meets its targets, the programme is a success. Thus, within the space between policy and practice actors can negotiate and fit their projects and interventions in a way it stays beneficial for themselves. This space, which was earlier called 'the gap', is indeed as functional as how Mosse (2004) explained it: the vagueness of policy language is necessary 'to conceal ideological differences, allow compromise and the enrolment of different interests, to distribute agency and multiply criteria of success within project systems' (p19). Actors use the gap to their own advantage and with this even contribute to the creation of the gap. They need this gap for all the reasons described above by Mosse and all the specific examples provided in this research (increase funding chances, claim successes, stick to own values, etc). The maintenance of the gap is in the interests of actors involved in policy design and implementation and therefore probably will never be closed.

The role of social interfaces in shaping participation on the ground
How social interfaces in and between the spaces of policy and practice shape women's participation on the ground differs per level. Through negotiations over interests and power within social interfaces international agreements on gender equality trickle down to national policy and in turn to organisational strategies. However, there is enough space for actors to only use those parts of agreements and policy which are beneficial for themselves. Therefore, social interfaces in and between the macro and meso level concerning international agreements and national policy have a limited influence on women's participation on the ground. What does shape women's participation are social interfaces between implementing organisations, the target group (poor women) and their environment. The different understandings of SLOPB staff concerning social sustainability and women's participation shape the implementation of the project fundamentally. Furthermore, the Bangladeshi context, especially the sensitivity to hierarchy and the position of women, makes that women's participation is limited. However, also here there is enough space for the Dutch WASH Alliance to claim successes due to the way women's participation is measured. Even though the project is strong with regards to women's empowerment and participation on paper and matches (some of) the highest forms of participation set out by Arnstein and Guaraldo Choguill, in reality understandings, values and power relations have such an influence on the level to which women can and want to participate that it matches lower forms of participation which will not lead to women empowerment. More attention from the DWA and Simavi in the understandings of SLOPB staff might lead to some changes, but the influence of the environment and its cultural values cannot be forestalled in policy and strategies. To implement an intervention which can significantly empower women a systemic transformation in gender equality is needed.

Chapter 7. Discussion

In order to analyse women's participation and how this concept is perceived by different actors I used the ladders of participation of Arnstein (1969) and Guaraldo Choguill (1996). They both argue that participation is not a singular concept but has different gradations (see chapter 2). Arnstein's ladder is focused on citizen power while Guaraldo Choguill developed an adjusted ladder for developing countries. The ladders of both scholars were helpful in my research. I noticed multiple differences between the descriptions of actors of the concept of participation during interviews and in strategy papers. Being able to compare them with the rungs on the two ladders made it possible for me to distinguish different forms of participation. I also used the ladders for analysing the forms of participation that I observed in the committee meetings. When I could identify all the different forms described and observed the ladder enabled me to compare these forms and to see where the differences lie.

Even though the ladders were helpful in the analysis of my data, I also encountered some limitations while using it. The ladder of Arnstein focuses on how the 'have-nots' can gain more power in government decisions. This is really described from the government's point of view in which it is assumed that they are willing to include citizens in participation structures and take the initiative to involve them. In Bangladesh, as in many (developing) countries, this is not the case. Also in SLOPB's project the initiative did not come from the government nor did it come from the citizens. Here it came from an external force, SLOPB in cooperation with Simavi in the Dutch WASH Alliance. SLOPB has set up committees themselves to enable participation in new developed structures of decision making. In Arnstein's descriptions of rungs of participation the possibility of such an external actor is not taken into account. Therefore the forms of participations that were described and the ones that I observed were not always a perfect fit with the rungs of Arnstein. However, Arnstein's ladder was still useful to me to the extent that I could generally fit forms of participation within rungs and compare them with each other.

Additionally I used the ladder of Guaraldo Choguill who adjusted hers to developing countries. Within her rungs there is more attention for the actual willingness of government to include citizens in decision making. She takes the objectives of community organisation a step further than Arnstein in stating that their function should not be limited to making changes within their communities, but that they also should have an influence in the political arena and make a sustainable change in the status quo. Furthermore, she argues that external support from a government or NGO makes the organisation of a community more effective. Since the involvement of an external force is included in Guaraldo Choguill's ladder it was easier to place the forms of participation that I observed in the rungs. However, she presents the government and its officials as non-supportive or even obstructive. When representatives or individuals are not able to participate it is blamed on the unwillingness, lack of interest, lack of resources or incompetence of the government. NGOs are presented more positive: they might get the government to change its attitude regarding citizen participation. This is a somewhat simplified presentation though. My research shows that there are many reasons why participation might be limited, which cannot always be blamed on the government but also on the motivation of women, the project interpretation and implementation of an NGO and the cultural values and context of a country. A ladder of participation which includes all of these actors and factors would probably get very complicated, but they should be taken into account when presenting a tool to assess participation.

Next to the limitations in the concepts used for analysis there were some other limitations to this thesis. My positionality probably influenced the outcomes of my research because this defines how others deal with and respond to my presence. I am a Dutch woman without a religion, I travelled with NGO staff to visit project sites and my accommodation was in the NGO office and later at a

university. I did try to adjust to Bangladeshi culture because, as Brown (2009) claims, researchers are highly dependent on people's goodwill, trust and cooperation to gather data. The way the researcher presents him or herself can have significant influence on research opportunities. Presenting myself as modest, wearing the appropriate outfits, quitting smoking and drinking and learning a bit of the language were measures that I took to fit in to some degree. However, with my presence and actions I still influenced the interaction between human agents and their interactions with me. For instance, the link with the NGO and maybe also my Western appearance made that many people thought I could provide them with a deep tube well. This was notable in how the women in the committees responded to me, but also in the way the government officials answered my questions.

A limitation on a different level is that I could not interview several important actors on due to time constrains. For example, I did not speak to Simavi staff or to any higher Dutch or Bangladeshi government officials. By interviewing these people I could have got a more comprehensive view of the social interfaces between different actors and how this can influence women's participation on the ground. However, even if I had more time, speaking to government officials or representatives is difficult due to their stay in different locations, their busy jobs and their other priorities. Therefore I chose to do a document analysis instead and by using this I tried to understand their policies, strategies and understandings of certain concepts.

What was not within the scope of this thesis, but what is interesting for further research is the way the different actors look upon these social interfaces. Policy makers are probably aware of how their policies are utilised by organisations to increase funding chances and organisations know that interactions at local levels influence the outcomes of their interventions. The views of these actors and the possible measures they take in their policies and interventions may provide new insights in how actors deal with the gap between policy and practice.

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