Empowerment in the Garment Industry
A Study on Home-Based Workers in Delhi, India

Charlotte Hellström
Master’s thesis, Political Science (30 ECTS)
Department of Government, Uppsala University
Supervisors: Hans Blomqvist & Suruchi Thapar-Björkert
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Abstract

India is becoming one of the biggest garment producers in the world and at the bottom of the industry women can often be found working from their homes because of norms restricting them what to do and where to go. These women often work under middlemen who take advantage of their disempowerment. The well-known Indian trade union/social movement the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) established its producer-company Ruaab to eliminate the middleman and link the home-based workers directly with the fashion companies.

This study investigates in what ways the women’s participation in the producer-company Ruaab impact their empowerment process. It is based on a two-month long field study in Delhi, India in which interviews were conducted with women working at three of Ruaab’s centers.

Drawing on Mosedale’s definition and Rowland’s analytical framework, the thesis looks at if the women are empowered in three different dimensions: personal, close relations and collective. The results show no clear patterns of empowerment but that SEWA’s work improves many aspects of the women’s life, and that their work should be considered an enhancing part in the women’s empowerment process.

Keywords: Empowerment, global garment industry, home-based work, SEWA
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1. Introduction

The global garment industry often brings to mind images of women working long hours in sweatshops in the global South. While this is part of the industry, a much more hidden and unknown part are home-based workers producing garments for global fashion companies from within the walls of their homes.

The global garment industry is often referred to as ‘a race to the bottom’, where home-based workers, often women, in the bottom are producing garments and embroidery for low piece rates. These workers are invisible not only because of their work-location but because they have no social or legal protection in form of contracts or labor laws. They are often the ones who pay for electricity and other costs of production and for many women the piece rate is so low that they cannot afford to pay for these extra costs, leaving them in a vicious circle. If trying to negotiate prices, the middleman often finds another home-based worker willing to make the garments for the lower price, decreasing workers’ bargaining potential (Archana & Dickson, 2017: 195; Stolle & Micheletti, 2013).

Unsustainable and unethical fashion consumption is becoming a bigger concern for consumers and as a result many want a more transparent production chain to ensure that no human rights violations are taking place, for example, child or forced labor. Studies have however also found that for many consumers a low price trumps the fact that a garment is ethically produced (Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

Many companies do not own their own factories and instead subcontract middlemen to manage production. So, in order for the middleman to earn money they cut costs and often leave the women making garments without much payment, showing that there are “comparative advantages of women’s disadvantage” (Islam & Hossain, 2015: 4). The Indian Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) is with its producer-company Ruaab trying to stop the often exploitive practices of middlemen by being the transparent link in the industry. However, as most consumers are not willing to pay extra for ethical fashion Ruaab has to compete with middlemen to get orders from the fashion companies.

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to investigate if home-based women in the bottom of the global garment industry achieve empowerment from organizing in SEWA’s producer-company Ruaab. Studies show that home-based work has less empowerment potential because it does not give
women independence or visible work-locations (Kantor, 2003: 426) and that “economic activities do not always improve women’s economic situation, and often add extra burdens” (Rowlands, 1997: 23).

Ruaab is an artisan producer-company based in Delhi, India. It has a “transparent, ethical and unique process model” (SEWA, 2019a), working towards securing that home-based workers, at the bottom of the global garment industry, are not the invisible last link. They work against exploitive practices by middlemen by upgrading skills, providing access to social support services as well as give them the opportunity to work from home (SEWA, 2019a). Kantor argues that “In the South Asian context, female seclusion norms often influence women’s choices regarding work location, making home-based work the best option for many women to access income. Hence, it becomes particularly important to assess how this work location, and production relation influence the empowerment potential of women’s work in this region” (2003: 426). This study aims to understand in what ways working at Ruaab might affect their processes towards empowerment. This study hence sets out to answer the following research question:

In what ways do participation in Ruaab impact women’s empowerment process?

It is however hard to measure a process, something that prominent scholars within the empowerment field still struggles with. This thesis will use a qualitative frame with interviews to understand the women’s experiences and how organizing in Ruaab impacts their empowerment process, as it is one of Ruaab’s main goals (SEWA, 2019a). The women’s answers will be analyzed and categorized into three dimensions: personal, close relations and collective to see in what ways their empowerment processes are impacted on these different levels affecting women in different ways.

1.2 Limitations

The aim of this study is to give insight to how women at the bottom of the global garment industry’s value chain negotiate between work and household responsibilities and how their work at Ruaab contributes to their sense of empowerment. It provides a deeper understanding of the situation these home-based workers are facing and the roles they negotiate on a daily basis. The results of the study will contribute to the growing literature on empowerment by investigating the empowerment processes and more specifically in what ways an organization of Ruaab’s type can affect women’s empowerment processes.
1.3 Disposition

The thesis is structured into six main parts: Introduction, Previous Research, Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Material, Analysis and Discussion, and Conclusion.

The chapter on previous research provides a broader understanding of the garment industry, the trade-union Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) and its producer-company Ruaab. This aims to give a deeper understanding to the situation of home-based women and also on SEWA and Ruaab’s part in the global garment industry. In the third chapter the empowerment concept is introduced since it works both as the theory in this study as well as the examined phenomenon. In this chapter the definition of empowerment will also be presented as well as the different ‘powers’ that the concept is based on. Since a big part of this study has been the planning and execution of the fieldwork in Delhi, India as a part of SIDA:s Minor Field Study (MFS) program, the methodology chapter provides insight to how the research was executed, and the methods and material used. The analytical framework provides information on how the interviews were coded and analyzed, while results and analysis are presented in chapter five. The last chapter provides a conclusion and suggested further research.

2. Previous Research

This chapter focuses on previous research on the garment industry and offers background on the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA). In section 2.1, the global garment industry and its changes during the last decades are explained. The section continues with an explanation of informal work, and more specifically home-based workers’ part in the global garment industry’s value chain. Section 2.2 provides background information about SEWA and its producer-company Ruaab in order to give deeper insight into how they work and organize home-based workers.

2.1 The Global Garment Industry

The garment industry has changed drastically over the last few decades. Forty years ago, most garment production was found in the global North but today most of the production has moved to the global South. Since the 1980's India has increased its garment production and is becoming one of the biggest garment producers in the world along with China, Bangladesh and Vietnam (Mezzadri, 2014: 241). Even though the industry is doing well, the garment industry does “exemplify the most advanced forms of globalization, vertically integrated manufacturing and
subcontracting, labor intensity, and corporate image making” (Brooks, 2007: xxii), and over the last few decades there has also been a ‘feminization of labor’, i.e. an increase in women’s participation in paid labor. While some argue that this increase of women in the marketplace will lead to their empowerment others argue that it only puts another burden on women.

Those arguing for women’s increased participation in labor in the global South often highlight that work will improve women’s lives since it leads to higher income, the break-down of centuries-old patriarchal norms because of shifts in gender roles, and greater awareness about rights and duties (Islam & Hossain, 2015). It is also argued that these women are contributing to the economic growth of the country, something that will eventually lead to their prosperity (Brooks, 2015). Some critics argue that women’s increased employment instead should be understood as a combination of patriarchy and capitalism since “female labor must either be cheaper to employ than comparable male labor, or have higher productivity, or some combination of both; the net result being that unit costs of production are lower with female labor” (Elson and Pearson, 1981: 92). So, while some scholars are optimistic about what paid work can do for women, others instead focus on what types of jobs are available for women, because women are often employed in low-skilled jobs where payment is low, working days are long and where work conditions often are hazardous. This is because women more often accept these conditions and are not as likely to engage in collective bargaining or organizations (Custer, 2012). Other studies, however, argue that these conditions are improving because women are starting to organize in their workplaces and communities, often with the help of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in order to confront and change poor conditions (Islam & Hossain, 2015).

A recurring phase in the thesis is the ‘the global garment value chain’ which is a labor-intensive, production-driven process. For companies it means having decentralized production in various countries, most often in the global South. The large fashion companies order goods from different contractors in these countries who then subcontract down the value chain (Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003).

2.1.1 The Indian Garment Industry

The Indian textile industry, which largely consists of garment production, is the second largest employer in the country with over 45 million employees (Ray et al., 2016; IBEF, 2018). The industry is worth around 1250 billion USD, making up 2 % of India’s GDP. India’s textile exports have multiplied since the 1990’s: in 1995 the export of textiles was 8 billion USD, it increased to 21
billion USD in 2009 and in 2017 the textile export had increased to 36 billion USD, contributing with 15% of the country’s exports (Ray et al., 2016; IBEF, 2018).

Most of the export is done thought big multi-national corporations that uses local contractors with whom they negotiate piece rates, making everything from management to labor conditions the contractor’s legal liability (Islam & Hossain, 2015). While India often is seen as a rising power in the global garment industry much of the success is the result of exploitive practices and labor arrangements (Mezzadri, 2014), since every part of the value chain is trying to cut costs.

Garment production most often takes place in different clusters, all of them unique. India’s biggest clusters are located in some of the biggest cities, such as Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bengaluru, with often small or medium sized firms operating in each cluster. In the year 2009 the 19 biggest clusters together produced 8.9 billion garment pieces (Ray et al., 2016). Every cluster has unique characteristics regarding for example labor solutions, which has made it almost impossible to obtain comprehensive working standards and conditions that can apply to all, especially since most workers are working informally and do not have permanent positions (Mezzadri, 2014). There are at least four different ‘layers’ within each cluster. On the top are the garment exporters, or more often the contractors, below are the subcontractors or the ‘middlemen’. Beneath them are those working with for example dying fabric and printing on fabric, and the fourth and final layer in this model are the craft-based workers who often do embroidery work, most often in a home environment (Mezzadri, 2014). This study will look at the fourth layer, namely the craft-based workers working from home.

2.1.2 Informal Work

The global garment industry consists to great extent of informal work, which should be understood as work that is not providing social or legal safety nets for the workers (WIEGO, 2018). So, while informal workers contribute a great part to the local and global economy they are left without protection and regulations by both State and contractors and hence do not get a share of the wealth (Chen, 2012).

Historically, employment in the informal market has expanded during times of economic recession because enterprises might have had to down-size or even shut down, which often push workers, that just have been laid-off, into the informal economy if they cannot find alternative formal work. A majority of workers in the global South have never had work outside the informal economy and most people who are working in the informal economy do not choose to do it. While some
voluntarily work informally to escape for example taxation and registration a majority of informal workers do it because of tradition, or because they have no other choice in order to survive (Chen, 2012). Informal employments are often very labor-intensive and based on social institutions and structural differences, such as for example caste, gender and mobility, and often includes “harsh relations of domination and subordination” (Mezzadri, 2014: 241).

Informal work is always depending on the contractor’s needs, meaning that they hire and let people off depending on the production needs of their orders. This happens especially in very low-skilled but labor-intensive industries such as the garment industry, where workers are easily replaceable (Islam & Hossain, 2015), leaving them without much bargaining power. There are many industries that use informal workers, with those working in the public being the most visible and those working within the walls of home being least visible.

In India the majority of the working population earn their livelihood in the informal economy and according to the latest data from 2011, 85 % of the workers outside of the agricultural sector work in the informal sector (Bhattacharya & Kesar, 2018: 727). For women this number is often deemed higher (See for example Krishna and NCEUS), and according to De Luca et al., 93 % of women in the work force can be found the informal sector (2013: 137).

The wages in the informal economy are lower than in the formal economy and women are consistently paid less than men, and almost 60 % of informal workers in urban areas are paid below the minimum wage of 279 rupees per day (De Luca et al., 2013). A recent report published by the Indian Ministry of Labor and Employment (2019) argues that the minimum wage in India should increase to 375 rupees per day in order for workers to afford living costs.

**2.1.3 Home-Based Work**

Home-based workers are the least visible in the global value chain. They are most often women who are working at the same time as taking responsibility for domestic chores and childcare. These women often work from home because of norms limiting what kind of work they can do and also where they can do it (Kantor, 2003). The norms are often based on tradition, religion and patriarchal societal structures and can restrict, for example, mobility and decision-making.

Home-based workers can be split into two different categories: sub-contracted workers and self-employed workers. The former often receive orders from a middleman who delivers up the value-chain both nationally and globally. These workers often receive material and instructions but do not have much knowledge about their link in the global value chain. The latter, the self-employed
workers, buy their own material and also sell the finished goods, most often in their local community. Both self-employed and sub-contracted workers take most of the risks of production, such as delayed payments or cancelled orders, and also extra costs such as electricity, equipment, and transport (Chen & Sinha, 2016).

In India home-based work makes up 18% of all urban employment, about 20% of urban informal employment and 32% of women’s employment in urban areas (De Luka et al., 2013: 138; Chen, 2014: 5). As previously mentioned, according to Kantor (2003), home-based workers have less empowerment potential since women do not receive work-locations that are visible, and their work does not give them independence.

2.2 Self Employed Women’s Association

The Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) is a member-based trade union founded in 1972 by Ela Bhatt in order to strengthen home-based women working informally in the textile industry. It broke free from the Textile Labor Association (TLA) because she saw the need to support home-based women and challenge traditional union norms and patriarchal norms that was not being done within the TLA (De Luca et al., 2013). Today SEWA is the largest trade union in India with over 1.75 million members in 12 Indian states (ILO, 2018).

The key objective of SEWA is to organize self-employed women for their social and economic empowerment. SEWA also works to achieve livelihood security for its members, aiming to achieve full employment in order for them to get work security, income security, food security and social security. Other important objectives are to organize women for self-reliance at both individual and community levels and to increase their decision-making abilities (SEWA, 2019b; ILO, 2018). SEWA works on different levels: on micro and meso levels where they aim for cooperation, to strengthen the collective by for example starting cooperatives, producer groups and increasing networking; and on a macro level for informal workers’ social and legal protection through their work to change labor standards (De Luca et al., 2013).

The large scope of SEWA’s work has moved it beyond a mere trade union, and it is often referred to as a social movement. It has set up numerous cooperatives and also provides different social protection schemes helping women in the informal work force with, for example, insurance, banking, education and childcare (De Luca et al., 2013). Their structure makes it possible for them to support women in different ways since they can “combine trade union negotiating strategies with co-operative formation and provision of support services” (OECD & ILO, 2019: 150). Even
if SEWA is registered as a union the organization acts more as an NGO in its work for empowerment through education and training, and its support services (Archana & Dickson, 2017).

The context SEWA is operating in is important; India has changed over the last four decades. Today India is one of the biggest economies in the world. However, almost 30% of India’s population, 300 million people, still live under the poverty line, and the country struggles with high illiteracy, unemployment, poor health and food insecurity. The rate of women in the labor force is still low with 23% of women in urban areas working as opposed to 76% of men. Unemployment is also higher among certain social groups such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (De Luca et al., 2013: 138).

The biggest project SEWA has in Delhi is its producer-company Ruaab, which will be presented in the next section.

### 2.2.1 Ruaab

Ruaab is an artisan producer-company that was established by SEWA year 2010 in Delhi, India, but the company has been producing embroidery under a different name since 2002. The production at Ruaab is mostly embroidery, with different clusters performing different types of embroidery. At Ruaab’s head office/center in New Ashok Nagar, which also hosts the showroom, most of the embroidery is of “regular” kind, often with beadings. At the centers in Sunder Nagri and Mulla Colony the embroidery is aari, a traditional type of embroidery with a hook on the needle, an artisan skill that often has been passed down from generation to generation. As long back as the Mughal times Delhi has been a center for crafts and tailoring, a tradition that still is being kept with Delhi being the heart of embellished garment making (Mezzadri, 2014).

Ruaab is connecting the home-based women directly to international brands but is also selling pieces at different artisan fairs across India. Ruaab is in direct contact with the international brands, eliminating middlemen from the process. They are however always competing with the middlemen for the orders, making them not able to bargain for much higher prices. But Ruaab “ensures [an] ethical and transparent supply chain” (SEWA, 2019a).

Ruaab is organizing about 500 women and most of them regularly work at one of the six centers. The centers are set up in areas where women’s mobility, due to patriarchal and social norms, often is restricted, something that often also is exploited by middlemen. SEWA provides them with an opportunity to access a more secure type of employment. The women are paid per finished piece
and SEWA argues that it is important for the women to be able to work flexibly either from home or at the centers since they have responsibility for children and household work (Archana & Dickson, 2017). Only women (and children) are allowed at the centers in order to ensure to stay “responsive to the community needs” (SEWA, 2019b).

3. Theoretical Framework

Empowerment is the theoretical framework used to understand and explain home-based women’s experiences at Ruaab. This chapter starts with an introduction of the concept of empowerment including different definitions and how it can be achieved. Then, power in empowerment is discussed in relation to empowerment.

3.1 Empowerment

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the fifth goal is gender equality and to “empower all women and girls” (UN, 2019). The empowerment goals are, however, not new, and the concept has been a buzzword in international development since gender mainstreaming in the 1990’s and is currently on the agenda of almost all the big aid donors, agencies and development organizations. When the term empowerment came into use in the middle of the 1980’s, it was a radical, feminist concept that was meant to challenge and transform structures such as patriarchy, ethnicity, caste and class (Batliwala, 2007). Calvè criticizes the change the concept has undergone from its radical grassroots of political mobilization, aimed at breaking down unequal societal structures, to becoming a vague concept that implies false consensus (2009: I). Batliwala (2007) argues that there are few words today that are so abused as the term empowerment. She especially criticizes the change from seeing empowerment as a collective process to having become an individual process, and also that there has been a neoliberal ‘hijacking’ of the term, that ‘liberalizing empowerment’ has become ‘liberal empowerment’. Some argue that women’s empowerment is important in order to achieve gender equality and development while others argue that gender mainstreaming has led to empowerment being viewed more as an outcome rather than a process, often in order for organizations or statistical analyses to show results. However, not all agencies and researchers use only the outcome approach and most scholars today regard empowerment primarily as a process.

Empowerment is not a process that can only be achieved by women but also by other groups facing other kinds of marginalization. Hence, much of the empowerment literature connects
empowerment not only with women but also with poverty. Kabeer (1999), among others, argues that only those who previously have been disempowered can become empowered. Importantly, she also distinguishes the disempowerment of women from the disempowerment of people living in poverty and emphasizes that women’s disempowerment should not be seen as a problem stemming from poverty, since that downplays patriarchal structures.

### 3.1.1 Defining Empowerment

Klein (2014) and Ibrahim & Alkire (2009) have combined found over 30 different definitions of empowerment currently being used in the empowerment literature. This wide use of the concept is by some seen as problematic while others argue that it is the very core of the concept. While some of the definitions are totally different, most of the definitions share some attributes.

Much of the literature lacks a clear definition of empowerment but when they have one many stems from Kabeer’s definition, which is the “expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (1999: 437). Chant and Sweetman (2012) has another approach to empowerment, with focus on economic aspects and if they are empowering. Their use of empowerment also differentiates a bit from those presented above as they are critical towards investing in women because of its potential economic benefits, since women then becomes ’tools’ to achieve economic development.

Duflo (2012), one of the recipients of The Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics 2019, also focuses on empowerment and economic development, but from a different vantage point. She does not define empowerment as a process, as much of the empowerment literature do, but as an outcome. She also sees gender equality and empowerment as being intertwined and hence does not distinguish the two concepts from each other. This view differs from Malhotra & Schuler who argue that it “hypothetically [...] could be an improvement in gender equality by various measures, but unless the intervening process involved women as agents of that change rather than merely its beneficiaries, we could not consider it empowerment” (2005: 72) They use Kabeer’s definition of empowerment and emphasizes two features: empowerment should be understood as a process starting from a disempowered situation and that empowerment is a multidimensional concept that always is context dependent. Further, they argue that resources should not be seen as an empowering factor, but rather an enabling factor. They do however not talk about either power or power relations in their conceptualization of empowerment.
The definition of empowerment used in this thesis is a modified version of Mosedale's definition: “the process by which women redefine and extend what [they perceive] is possible for them to be and do in situations where they have been restricted, compared to men, from being and doing” (2005: 252). *They perceive* has been added in order for the definition to be useable since “what is possible for them to be and do” has too broad a scope for this thesis. The definition is chosen because it focuses on gendered power relations as well as women’s development and perceived transformative potential.

### 3.1.2 Achieving Empowerment

For Kabeer, who argues that empowerment is a process that includes the importance of exercising choice, what leads to empowerment is the processes in which women can use resources, agency and achievements to make empowering choices. She also highlights that in order to be empowered one needs to come from a place of disempowerment. She argues that “how changes in women’s resources will translate into changes in the choices they are able to make will depend, in part, on other aspects of the conditions in which they are making their choices” (Kabeer, 1999: 443). This is important to bear in mind, especially since so many seem to regard that only the increase in resources as empowering. Agency, Kabeer argues, should be seen as the capability to decide one’s own goals in life and to define life choices that one follows even when faced with disapproval from others (1999: 438).

Malhotra & Schuler (2005), Mosedale (2005), and Chant & Sweetman (2012) all build on Kabeer’s definition but do not share the same view of what leads to empowerment. While Kabeer argues that the “ability to exercise choice” (1999: 435) is a vital aspect of becoming empowered, Chant & Sweetman (2012: 527) emphasize that ‘transformative potential’ is important, that women and girls, in order to increase their agency, need actors within development institutions to eliminate race, class and gender constraints that are built into social structures. They further argue that in order for women to be empowered, all women need to be valued, not only those who have the ability to contribute to the economy. They also emphasize the importance of including boys and men in order to support women’s empowerment.

Sharp (et al.) emphasize the complexity of achieving empowerment and demonstrate that many women benefit from the prevailing patriarchal structures rather than trying to challenge them. In order for empowerment to be achieved, the struggle needs to come from within a community or society, rather than pushed from outside. They also put great emphasis on the importance of
including men in order for structural change to occur and argue that not all men have positions of power and that some structures that women face, many marginalized men also face (2003: 283).

Cornwall (2016), among others, emphasizes that there is no such thing as a one-size-fits all solution when it comes to women’s empowerment and that it is very dependent on whether women feel they are gaining control over their lives. She provides some examples of what she argues leads to empowerment: that involvement of women is critical and that this leads to reflection and ‘consciousness raising’ that leads to transformation. However, she argues that “working with critical consciousness can expand women’s horizons of possibility and with it, the potential transformative impact of access to independent income” (Cornwall, 2016: 348). She thereby shifts focus and sees resources as being a measure of empowerment. She also focuses on the importance of building collective power and the power of relationships in order to achieve empowerment and social change. Cornwall’s focus is hence on the opportunity for women themselves to develop and on the need to create spaces in which “people can build confidence and self-esteem” (Cornwall, 2016: 356).

Malhotra & Schuler argue that measurements, such as those that Pitt et al. (2006) use, for example, resources (of economic, social or political kind) and education, in fact should be seen as enabling factors that can stimulate an empowerment process rather than measures of empowerment. To be able to make decisions that affect one’s life, such as whether to have more children, whom to marry, whether to work or pursue education, are in many settings agreed upon as being empowering. For example, a woman in Bangladesh being able to visit a healthcare center without getting permission from her husband is a sign of empowerment in that specific context, while it might not be in another country (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005).

Mosedale argues that it is problematic that traditional development goals such as better health or increased income in many cases have become equivalent with empowerment and that the important focus on, for example, power relations between the genders is thereby dismissed. What she emphasizes is hence the importance of the underlying concept of power in assessing empowerment. In her use of empowerment, agency plays a great part. She argues that it is important to differentiate between what women actually can do and what the law says, for example. If a law is passed where women’s right to land increases, but there is no change in the informal rules of who has the right to own land, women have not been empowered by the decision (even though this should be considered good in itself) (Mosedale, 2005: 255).

Rowlands argues that empowerment is achieved when people can expand their opportunities without being constrained by structures or the State, or when faced with structural constraints
She also argues that empowerment “is concerned with the processes by which people become aware of their own interests and how those relate to those of others, in order both to participate from a position of greater strength in decision-making and actually to influence such decisions.” (Rowlands, 1995: 102). This empowerment process can take place on different levels or dimensions: on the personal level, in close relations, and on the collective level. She also emphasizes an important difference between a ‘situation of empowerment’ and ‘an empowering situation’ where the former is where all the ‘powers’ are fulfilled on the three levels. The latter, on the other hand, is where some of the conditions are met but not all of them (Rowlands, 1995: 102). Rowlands emphasizes the importance of power in order to fully understand empowerment, which will be explored below.

### 3.1.3 The Power in Empowerment

Since empowerment derive from the concept of power, how scholars view and define empowerment has much to do with how they view and define power (Sharp et al., 2003). Rowlands (1995) argue that the fact that power can be experienced and understood in so many different ways makes the concept so disputed but that it is of importance to understand that power can take many different shapes in order to fully understand an empowerment process. She therefore differentiates between four types: ‘power over’, ‘power to’, ‘power with’ and ‘power from within’, each having different implications for the empowerment process.

‘Power over’ is the most commonly referred to power and refers to power as ‘zero-sum’, meaning that if someone increases their power, someone else’s power decreases. It means that some people have control and influence over other people. ‘Power over’ is most often exercised “by men over other men, by men over women, and by dominant social, political, economic or cultural groups over those who are marginalized” (Rowlands, 1995: 101f). However, feminists within the empowerment framework argues: “is not about replacing one form of power with another: they do not want a ‘bigger piece of the cake but a different cake’ and the increased choice […] that power brings should not reproduce social inequalities or restrict the rights of others” (Luttrell & Quiroz, 2009: 6). For Rowlands (1997) ‘power over’ is about understanding the dynamics of oppression.

‘Power to’ is not a “zero-sum” type of power and should be understood as “the capacity to act, to organize and change existing hierarchies” (Luttrell & Quiroz, 2009: 8) which, when it comes to empowerment, means that the focus is on the possibility to gain access and increase the capability to make decisions, and increase what is achievable for a person, without infringing on what is
achievable for another person. Learning to read is hence an example of ‘power to’ (Mosedale, 2005: 250; Luttrell & Quiroz, 2009: 8).

‘Power with’ focuses on collective power and action, with “the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals” (Rowlands, 1997: 13). It focuses on how gaining power not only strengthens the individual but also strengthens the power of others. How, when women are working together and, for example, reflect on their situation and realize their strengths, they can achieve change (Mosedale, 2005; Luttrell & Quiroz, 2009).

‘Power from within’ is “the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes us truly human. Its basis is self-acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals.” (Rowlands, 1997: 12). It is hence about self-esteem and self-confidence and should be understood as the starting point of the empowerment process, that an increase in awareness and a desire for change is needed (Mosedale, 2005; Luttrell & Quiroz, 2009).

Empowerment focuses mainly on the three ‘powers’: ‘power to’, ‘power with’ and ‘power from within’. However, achieving empowerment is different from having power. If someone has a lot of power it does not mean that one is powerful since in order to be empowered one needs to come from a place of disempowerment (Kabeer, 1999).

4. Methodology and Material

This chapter starts off by presenting the material and methods used in this study, by discussing the selection of respondents as well as how the interviews were executed. Section 4.2 continues with a discussion on ethical considerations of field work while section 4.3 discusses reflexivity and interviewer effects. A critique against the chosen method and material is found in section 4.4. The analytical framework and operationalization of empowerment as well as how the data has been categorized is presented in section 4.5 and 4.6.

4.1 Qualitative Case Study

This thesis is based on a case study of home-based women’s process of empowerment in the bottom of the global garment industry when organizing in SEWA’s producer-company Ruaab. The study uses a qualitative approach with interviews to get a deeper understanding of processes towards empowerment. Interviews works best for contexts where not much previous research have
been completed and where the aim is to get a deeper understanding about human lives and the meaning they give to different phenomenon (Esaiasson et al., 2012: 252). Doing interviews in field research can also provide a more complete image of the context studied, since deeper understandings often derives from in-depth conversations (Bailey, 2018: 3) Another reason for using a qualitative framework is that quantitative studies is not as well adapted to get in-depth knowledge: “[s]tatistical perspectives on decision-making should […] be remembered for what they are: simple windows on complex realities. They may provide a brief glimpse of process and decision-making, but they tell us very little about the subtle negotiations that go on between women and men in their private lives. Consequently, they may underestimate the informal decision-making agency which women often exercise” (Kabeer, 2002: 34). So, the results from interviews gives a more complex and in-depth understanding as well as it paints a more complete picture that cannot be “obtained by asking them to take part in an experiment or complete a survey about everyday events” (Bailey, 2018: 3). Scholars within the empowerment field also argue that “the process of empowerment is essentially qualitative in nature” (Malhotra et al., 2002: 20).

The empirical material for this study was collected during a two months long field study in Delhi, India between October and December 2018. Contact with SEWA was established in August 2018 with the help from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and after being in contact with several different people at SEWA the field study could start in the end of October 2018. A pilot study and the interviews were conducted during the period 2/11 until 11/12 at three different locations in the outskirts of Delhi.

During the time at SEWA numerous hours was spent integrating and working side by side with the home-based women. The working hours were Monday-Saturday 9.30 to 17.30 (also for the author of this thesis) at the center in New Ashok Nagar or at SEWA Bharat head office in South Patel Nagar, since SEWA wanted to offer a deeper understanding of the work they are doing. Participation in meetings, both at the head office and with home-based workers, participation in the international trade fair, various field trips and daily work at the centers are some of the chores that was completed in addition to the interviews. During the months at SEWA about half of the time was spent at the head office in South Patel Nagar while the other half at the Ruaab head office/center in New Ashok Nagar and it provided a deeper understanding of the company structure and the organization of both SEWA and Ruaab.
4.1.1 Interviews

When doing interviews, it is of vital importance that the questions asked not only are formulated so they can answer the research question but also that they are applicable in the context the study takes place (Bryman, 2002: 419). Much time was hence put into designing questions that would be easy for the respondent to answer as well as providing enough information to answer the research question. A semi-structured design was used for the interviews and while the interview guide had a fixed set of questions, they were not strictly followed during the interviews. Sometimes the questions came in a different order and in some cases follow-up questions were added, all depending on the dynamic of the interview.

The small pilot study with three women was done in order to get an understanding about what type of questions that would fit in the context and if the formulation of the questions was easy to understand for the respondents. From the pilot study it became obvious that some of the questions had to be altered to get a better understanding of the women’s situation. The final interview guide (see Appendix B) have four main categories with questions about the respondent’s background, close relations, sense of community at Ruaab as well as questions of how they personally have changed since joining Ruaab.

A total of 23 semi-structured interviews were completed but as three of them were part of a small pilot study and only the results from the 20 remaining interviews were used in the analysis. Ten of the interviews were done with women at Ruaab’s center in New Ashok Nagar in east Delhi, six interviews were carried out at Ruaab’s center in Sunder Nagri in the northeastern part of Delhi and the last four were done at the Ruaab’s center in Mulla Colony even further east. All centers were in heavily populated areas characterized by poverty and substandard housing in the outskirts of Delhi.

All of the interviews were conducted with an interpreter and the first interview was interpreted by a designer at the Ruaab center in New Ashok Nagar. Interview 2-10 was interpreted by a student at the University of Delhi. She had previously worked as a teacher in English and also taught a basic computer class at a SEWA skill center. She had no previous experience or knowledge about Ruaab, so before our first interview she was told how Ruaab worked and how the center is run for her to understand and interpret in a correct way. The plan was that she would interpret all of the interviews but due to personal reasons she could only interpret nine interviews. For the interviews at Sunder Nagri two different women from SEWA’s head office in Delhi did the interpretation and for the last four interviews in Mulla Colony a woman who was organized in another part of SEWA did the interpretations. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Because different
translators were used, parts of six interviews were also transcribed by an external professional translator, who is fluent in both English and Hindi, in order to validate that the answers received from the interpreter was consistent with the answers the respondents gave. This was done after all the interviews to control for the use of different interpreters.

4.1.2 Selection of Respondents

It became clear that the center was low on orders, in the end of October the center was full of life and women working on the floor in the entrance in New Ashok Nagar, but a few weeks in to the study there where not many women doing their embroidery work at the center and sometimes the center was empty. They were waiting for a new order to get approved before starting work on the next order.

From the beginning the plan was for all interviews to take place with women working at the New Ashok Nagar center (Ruaab’s head office) but due to low work-orders in mid-November not many women came to the center. So, when ten women working at the center in New Ashok Nagar had been interviewed there was a problem finding more women. This was solved by including two other Ruaab centers into the study, the center at Sunder Nagri and the center in Mulla Colony. The respondents at Sunder Nagri were selected because they were at the center when we arrived and agreed to be interviewed. The women at Mulla Colony were called beforehand and asked to come to the center if they had time for an interview. The difference between the centers is that they do different types of embroidery and that the two added centers are in Muslim communities while New Ashok Nagar is in a Hindu community.

The selection of respondents was done by SEWA. However, the women they chose for the interviews were women who came to the center almost daily, so they did not seem to put any deeper thought into whom to pick, but instead used a convenience sample. It is of course possible to critique this way of selecting respondents as the chosen women might not be representative for the whole population of women working at Ruaab. However, this selection process was the only possible solution at hand and there is no indication that the selection of women is biased in any important respect.

4.2 Ethical Considerations

The Swedish Research Council provides four main ethical principles to follow when doing research within the field of social science: information, consent, confidentiality and utilization
(Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). To ensure that all participants in the study were treated with respect and integrity these principles were followed closely in order to do no harm. Prior to all interviews consent was obtained from all respondents, both to participate in the interview and for it to be recorded. It was also clarified that the interviews were confidential and that the respondents could end the interview at any time, and also change their minds afterward. No written confirmation to participate in the interviews were signed since not all of the women could read or write, it was instead obtained orally. The participants did also get information that the interviews were anonymous, that their names or any other characterizing features would not be used in the thesis.

4.3 Reflexivity and Interviewer Effect

A researcher’s role is to formulate the research question, collect the data, analyze it and draw conclusions from it. It is hence of vital importance to understand and critically reflect on how the researcher affects the research process and outcome and to think about what role culture, values and history plays in this (Bailey, 2018: 136).

The fact that such a long period of time was spent with the women at the center in New Ashok Nagar might have made the interviewed women feeling more comfortable during the interviews. There was however no possibility to spend much more time at the two added centers than the time spent there during the interviews. All of the interviews did however take place in an environment that the women were used to be in, in order to decrease any feelings of discomfort.

During the whole period SEWA’s clothing policy was followed which meant wearing a kurta (tunic) with salwar (pants) and dupatta (scarf). While most home-based workers at the centers wore sarees, kurtas were worn mostly by younger women. However, other things that might affect the respondents, like age, gender, skin and hair color or education was not anything that could be changed but should be taken into consideration for how it might have affected the answers in the interviews.

4.4 Critique against Method and Material

It would ideally be best to measure empowerment in two different points in time, since that would provide the best way to measure a process (Malhotra et al., 2002:19) However, this is not possible due to the scope of this study that only allows for an intense study during a short period. The study does however face some problems that needs to be taken into consideration. Many of the
respondents in the study have been part of Ruaab for such a long time it is arguable that they in some ways might have forgotten how their situation was before joining and hence may exaggerate their answers in favor of Ruaab. However, the answers provided by the women included critique against SEWA and Ruaab, for example about limited income, which gives an indication that this was not the case.

Another fact that needs to be discussed is that the interpreters used during the interviews were either working at SEWA or provided by SEWA. However, only the interpreter for the first interview worked at Ruaab. This might of course have affected the answers provided by the women, if they, for example, felt that what they said could be used against them. However, as discussed above some of the women did not shy away from critiquing SEWA. Another disadvantage of having to use interpreters to conduct the interviews is that the questions asked and the answers given can be misunderstood either by the interpreter or by the interviewed women. This transmission problem could not be circumvented in this case because it was necessary to use an interpreter to conduct the interviews. However, in order to validate the transcriptions, another translator was asked to listen to some of the recorded interviews and then compared with what was written in the transcriptions.

4.5 Analytical Framework

How to measure empowerment is almost as debated as the definition of empowerment. Rowlands (1995) has developed three dimensions of empowerment that gives deeper understanding of how the empowerment process can take different shapes in different contexts: personal, close relationships and collective empowerment. Ibrahim & Alkire (2007: 5) also emphasizes the importance of understanding empowerment in different dimensions, or domains as they call it, to fully understand the empowerment process.

Personal empowerment is about ‘power from within’ and “developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalized oppression” (Rowlands, 1995: 103). Internalized oppression should be understood as the process in which groups or individuals who have been oppressed and denied influence and power internalize the messages that they receive and begin to think that the current situation is right and might even start to use the same method as the oppressor against oneself or one’s group. Which, according to Rowlands, should be understood as a survival mechanism (1995: 102).
Empowerment in close relationships is about “developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and decisions made within it” (Rowlands, 1995: 103) and collective empowerment is when “individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact than each could have had alone” (Rowlands, 1995: 103). The dimensions are not mutually exclusive but can overlap, as can be seen in figure 1.

Different ‘power relations’ are present in different dimensions of a person’s live. Three different dimensions of empowerment are therefore used to give a more comprehensive picture of the women’s experiences at Ruaab. This also gives a clearer view of how the empowerment processes are affecting women in different ways on each level.

To measure empowerment, Rowlands has developed a model with core values of the empowerment process for each of the three dimensions - personal, close relations and collective - in her book Questioning Empowerment: Working with women in Honduras (1997) that will be used as the analytical framework and operationalization. She describes these values as “the 'core' of the empowerment process, that is, the transformation of the individual or the group that is the 'key' that opens 'locks' on the empowerment door; and the circumstances that appear to encourage or inhibit the process” (1997: 111). A few of the ‘cores’ from Rowlands’ model have been omitted since they are not applicable in the context of this study.

The core values of collective empowerments (see figure 2) are to achieve a sense of collective agency, to feel group identity, and to have group dignity. This leads to changes that include for example the ability to respond as a collective to external events, to achieve recognition from outsiders and receive their support, and to have increased access to resources (Rowlands, 1997: 116). In the interview guide (see appendix B) the questions on collective empowerment are, for example, “Do you feel that your group is valued and respected in the community? and “Do you feel a sense of group belonging at Ruaab?”.
Empowerment in close relations looks at the woman’s closest family which in most Indian cases is her husband, children and sometimes in-laws. The core values (see figure 2) are here the ability to negotiate, communicate and receive support, and to have a sense of “self” in the relationship, as well as to defend herself and her rights (Rowlands, 1997: 120). The change in behavior can be the increased capacity to make own choices, increase in respect from oneself and others, and increased control over for example income, use of time, ability to attend meetings etc. (ibid.). In the interview guide the questions on women’s close relations are, for example, “Do you feel that you can stand up for yourself and your needs in your close relationships?” and “Do you feel supported by your family?”.

The cores of personal empowerment (see figure 2) are in this model for women to achieve a sense of agency, to gain self-esteem and self-confidence, and develop a sense of self in a broader context. (Rowlands, 1997: 112). The changes in behavior as a result of an empowerment process can for example be the increased ability to formulate and express opinions and ideas, the increased ability to obtain and control resources, the increased ability to interact with people outside of home, and an increased sense that things are possible (ibid.). In the interview guide the questions about personal empowerment are those under the heading with the same name. The respondents were asked questions such as “Do you feel that you can stand up for yourself and your rights?” and “Have your self-confidence and/or self-esteem changed since you joined Ruaab?”. Self-confidence and self-esteem have been merged into one variable since they have been difficult to clearly separate in the translations.

The concept of empowerment was not discussed during the interviews, partly because it is the framing used by SEWA but also because the respondents should not think of their answers in terms of empowerment. Also, as previously discussed, empowerment is a concept that can mean different things to different people in different contexts.

**Cores of Empowerment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collective Empowerment</th>
<th>Empowerment in Close Relations</th>
<th>Personal Empowerment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group identity</td>
<td>Ability to negotiate</td>
<td>Self-confidence and self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of collective agency</td>
<td>Ability to communicate</td>
<td>Sense of Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group dignity</td>
<td>Ability to get support</td>
<td>Sense of ‘self’ in a wider context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 – Core elements of empowerment
Since empowerment is a slow process that takes time, in order to see if the women are empowered when working for SEWA, the respondents were divided into three groups where group A consists of the eight women who have worked at Ruaab for 1-4 years, group B, of the eight women who have worked at Ruaab for 5-8 years and group C of the four women who have worked the longest at Ruaab, 9-12 years. The aim with this grouping is, because empowerment is a process, to see if the women who have been with Ruaab for the longest time also have come the furthest in the empowerment process. The analysis also looks at how the women perceived their changes since starting to work at Ruaab. Even though it is not a quantitative study it is interesting to find patterns within the material that might indicate different directions and themes, something that also is included in the analysis.

4.6 Categorizing Data

All the transcribed interviews were imported into MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis program used for large amount of texts and data. Due to the large material this provided an efficient way to code. The material was coded into three primary categories following the dimensions, but due to overlapping sometimes the same material was coded in two dimensions. Since the interview questions were organized and developed from the operationalization of empowerment, the coding also followed that structure. The answers from the interviews were not only coded to fit into the dimensions but also into subcategories connected to the ‘cores’ of empowerment. The answers connected to the ‘cores’ of empowerment that did not entail a change or process were also included and used in the analysis. The few times there was unclarity in the material, if a quote should be considered an increase in empowerment or not, the quote was included in the analysis to increase transparency. In Figure 3, an example is given of how the coding of empowerment processes has taken place based on quotations from the transcribed interviews. Even though all coding were done in MAXQDA, the analysis was done manually in order to gain more oversight of the material.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“My self-confidence has increased, day by day it increases. Before joining Ruaab I was afraid and had low confidence but after joining Ruaab I have increased confidence and I feel bold and can go anywhere.”</td>
<td>Personal empowerment</td>
<td>Increased self-confidence due to work at Ruaab</td>
<td>Perceived personal empowerment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents the results and analysis of the interviews with women working at Ruaab. It is divided into three parts: collective empowerment, empowerment in close relations and personal empowerment, in accordance with the analytical framework. At the end of each section there is a discussion on the women’s empowerment process.

5.1 Collective Empowerment

Collective empowerment is not about individual women’s experience from organizing in Ruaab, but how they together as a group perceive that they can tackle problems, get support, and feel group identity as well as getting respect from the outside community.

Support

Most women talked about the other women at the center as family members or as friends and the support for each other were both on private and work-related levels. All women said that they felt supported by the other women at Ruaab, that they together became a stronger entity. When it came to achieving change, most of the women believed in the power of numbers, “alone I cannot do anything, I understand that I need four or five women around me so we as a group can go and address the problem” (Yasim, Sunder Nagri).

Many women felt feelings of connectedness, of friendships, that they could go to the centers to meet colleagues, to gossip and ventilate issues within, for example, family. Everybody at the center supported the woman sharing her experiences and was letting her get her voice heard without questioning her. One woman said that they sometimes give up their work if one of the other women (or sisters as they call each other) is in need of money. They give up their work and give it to the woman who needs the money for her to do it, as a sign of respect.
There is a sense of collectiveness between us, so for example, if the rates, the price that we get paid per piece, if we do not feel that is the appropriate price all of us will leave the work. It has come to that, that we all have left work together and said no: first we negotiate prices then we will get back to work. For many of the women here it is the sole source of income for them but even if the need is there, when they see that the other women are not working, they will also give up the work.

(Tabasim, Sunder Nagri)

It is clear that there is a strong supportive network at all of the Ruaab centers. The women together have the agency to achieve desired changes and stand up for themselves when they feel that they are not being treated fairly.

**Respect from the Community**

While some of the women did not give a straightforward answer to the question if Ruaab is respected in the community, a majority of the women felt that Ruaab was respected:

People recognizes Ruaab’s work […] it is a good place, a safe place, so it is respected.

(Saaleha, Sunder Nagri)

Two out of the twenty women expressed that Ruaab was not respected in their community. One of them said that the community were backbiting them when going to work at Ruaab while the other one said that:

[My husband asks] why are you going there? What will the community say because all relatives are in highest posts. Higher posts mean like banks and schoolteachers. My female relatives are on the higher posts in government jobs so my husband thinks that if he permits me to go to Ruaab what will the community say? My husband thinks it is the lowest level of work.

(Nadeeka, New Ashok Nagar)

This quote might however just be an implication that it is based on status rather than respect for Ruaab’s work, since he believes that their family has “reached further”. But it is also clear from the interview that she has negotiated with her husband to be able to come to Ruaab because of the group belonging at the center. She argues that they help her, and that they tackle problems together as well as that they have a good time when they meet at the center. Many women said that they told their friends and family about Ruaab and the work they are doing, which have made them want to join Ruaab as well.

The reasons the women brought up for why Ruaab is respected within the communities is because it is an all-female workplace, it provides a secure income and that it is deemed as a safe place to
work. It is however hard to know what came first, if the women work at Ruaab because it is respected or if it is respected because of these women working at Ruaab. It might also be a combination of both, strengthening Ruaab’s position within the communities.

Collective Empowerment?

Narayan argues that “collective capabilities and organizations are often critical in helping […] break through constraints of powerlessness and voicelessness” (2005: 6). It becomes clear from the interviews that there is an ongoing process of collective empowerment. At the centers in New Ashok Nagar and Sunder Nagri this process has come further and Ruaab is also a more established part of these communities, while at the center in Mulla Colony the process has not come as far, as it is also the center that is newest of the three. It is clear that Ruaab has gained respect and support both from within the groups as well as the surrounding communities, making the women connected to Ruaab increase their powers as well as making their voices heard.

5.2 Empowerment in Close Relations

This section analyzes the women’s answers about their close relationships, looking at their mobility, income and possibility to get support and respect from their families.

Money is Power

A clear majority of the women at the centers kept the income from Ruaab for themselves and spent it on whatever they wanted, most often on children’s needs and education or on make-up, clothes and jewelry: “I pay bills, school fees, tutoring fees and I buy clothes and household things (Padmajai); “I buy my own things, clothes and make-up items. If I earn more, I want to buy for my kids and husband as well” (Vadivu, New Ashok Nagar). One of the women used her income in order to buy more expensive items at the market:

I control my money and I spend it on myself, on the needs of my children and myself. When I go to the market my husband only gives me, for example, 100 rupees so if I want something that costs 200 rupees or 300 rupees, I can purchase it with that money. I generally spend it on clothes and stuff like that.  

(Saaleha, Sunder Nagri)

All in all, fifteen of the interviewed women allocated her income in whatever way she wanted. All of the women in group C, who had worked at Ruaab 9-12 years kept their money for themselves.
The women who gave their income to husband or parents to take care of, two are found in group B and three in group A.

When a woman can use her income whatever way she wants does not automatically mean that the she is empowered, it can also be understood as a resilient male breadwinner model, that it is the husband’s role to provide for the family, that is why the wife can use the money in whatever way she wants (Kabeer, 1997). However, Idika showed that this role can be fluid as she was the breadwinner in the family while her husband did not earn enough money, but when he started to earn more the roles shifted back to the husband as the breadwinner. Another woman used to give her income to her husband but as he did not give her any credit for it, she decided to keep it for herself instead:

I gave all the money to my husband but my husband did not give me any recognition for it and no money for me to spend so now I do not give them […] I spend it on whatever I want to wear, like clothes, food or anything the children want then whatever is saved I put into the bank.

(Karo, Sunder Nagri)

For another woman, the income was vital for her and her children’s survival since her husband was an alcoholic:

I want my husband to quit drinking because most of the income is consumed on drinks. I have to pay 3500 – 4000 rupees for food and rent every month. Only the rent is 3000 so I only have 500 – 1000 rupees remaining for food. I earn some at Ruaab but I have many difficulties in how to manage the household, what to purchase and what not to purchase.

(Jalela, New Ashok Nagar)

Even though being in control of one’s income is considered a vital part of the empowerment process it is arguable that Jalela’s situation instead should be considered as a hindering the empowerment process, that even though she was in charge of her income and the household expenses this was not because of a shift in power relations but rather a circumstance that was pressuring her.

For some of the women it was obvious that they would keep their money for themselves while for others it was obvious to give the money to their parents or husband. Two of the young unmarried women working at Mulla Colony kept the money for themselves. Dhahiyah argues: “Why should parents take the money? If we work, the money is ours”. Another young unmarried woman instead gave all of her income to her parents.

The amount of money the workers could earn at Ruaab was 20 rupees (0,25 €, December 2018) per hour for items sold at the domestic market while orders connected to an export house (e.g.
H&M or GAP) was higher with 25 rupees (0,32 €) per hour. They are paid per finished pieces on a monthly basis and keep a record of how many pieces they produced in books at the centers. However, if Ruaab do not have enough orders for the women, they do not get any salary, even though one of Ruaab’s main goals is for women to have a secure income.

Because it is a little notch here in Ruaab I am not having a good time. There was a time when I could earn much but now I get 500 – 600, that’s it! I want Ruaab to get back on track so I can earn money. But I have a back-up plan to open some kind of shop or something like that because I have children […]

my son is in 4th standard and my daughter is in 3rd standard and the demands are increased day by day because they are getting into higher classes.

(Idika, New Ashok Nagar)

The situation with the low work orders was however only present at the center in New Ashok Nagar and not in Mulla Colony and Sunder Nagri, as they use another type of embroidery and hence work on different orders.

Increased control over income should however not be understated but understood as one of the core changes in the empowerment process. To be in control of income can however not by itself be enough for women to become empowered. Within the development field it has been widely believed that women’s participation in paid labor per se leads to empowerment, something academic studies have found not necessarily to be the case; when a woman gets her own income it does not necessarily increases her decision making or power within the family (Narayan, 2005: 22).

Most of the women interviewed in the study are mothers. Previous studies have showed that mothers tend to spend money on their children (Samman & Santos, 2009: 24), and the women at Ruaab were no exception. The fact that many of the women spent their income on children’s education can be seen as that the woman is actually not using the money on her own needs and hence should be considered as part of the family economy. It is however arguable that when women spend money on their children it does not necessarily mean that she is contributing to the household as such, as Nadeeka explains:

After my children passed the 5th standard my husband says that he wants to educate them in government school, but I have decided that no, my children is educated only in private school because private school is better than government school. Private schools have higher fees and charges more in comparison with government school. Government does not take charges for the education, but the private schools take high charges like school fees and activity fees. After joining Ruaab I feel I need to earn money to help the children and pay for school fees, tuition fees, and stationary items after 5th standard.

(Nadeeka, New Ashok Nagar)
This shows that women allocated their money on what they thought were important, in this case education of children. Her husband did not find private schools a necessity for their children and hence was not putting part of his income towards it. As mothers are more likely than fathers to invest in their children, making policies or interventions to empower women are more likely to have a positive effect on the children. While this is not a part of the empowerment process per se the women at Ruaab are prioritizing their children, both boys and girls, which might also open up possibilities for girls in the future:

When I was kid there were no priority of girls in the community. For some people in India girls are no good. Girls are doing the household things because they do not understand that girls are good at other things. Before, 10-15 years ago they had no knowledge at all that girls can do anything.

(Haima, New Ashok Nagar)

**Decision-Making, who has the final say?**

Many of the women said that they could make decisions within the family, about for example their children’s education or what to buy. However, when asked about what happened if the husband did not agree with the woman’s decision most of them said that the husband had the final say. This shows that the woman in fact was not able to make decisions but rather had the opportunity to put forward alternatives. However, for many women this might be a big progress from where they did not feel that they could speak up at all.

I have decision-making when my husband thinks the same as me […] I am more confident, if he thinks that I am right then he supports me, otherwise not.

(Feba, New Ashok Nagar)

I have decision-making. […] when I want to purchase, I have to ask him [husband] if it is okay to purchase or not. If he agrees I can buy.

(Bairavi, New Ashok Nagar)

I still do not have a say in the household […] I am allowed to take all my decisions but not all of the family decisions because my husband checks everything. He is the one who finalize all decisions.

(Idika, New Ashok Nagar)

So, even if most of the women kept, for example, their incomes for themselves it became clear in the interviews that husband or fathers had great influence in the women’s lives. Even if the income was allocated by the woman, she still did not have the final say in family decision.
One of the five unmarried women in the interviews were using the fact that she was working at Ruaab to be able to put off marriage for a while. With her income, decision-making, or at least bargaining, increased to the extent she could postpone it:

If I did not have this work I would have to get married earlier but now I can negotiate it with my parents: it is better that I am earning myself at this moment and can be independent. It is better than you are marrying me off to someone and me being dependent on that person. And also I am quite young right now so it is okay, like me working for a few years and then probably I will get married. I am not shying away from marriage or anything but if I have gotten this opportunity, I will use it and wait with marriage.

(Tabasim, Sunder Nagri)

For two of the unmarried women at Mulla Colony their brothers played a significant part in their decision-making and what they were allowed and not allowed to do. One of the women wanted to pursue higher education:

I passed 12th grade and was willing to go for further studies but my brother did not allow me [...] I cannot take any decisions in the family [...] it is the father’s way.

(Dhahiyah, Mulla Colony)

The work at Ruaab were for some of the women’s families not considered a ‘real work’ because it could be completed from home. For Abeda, who works in Mulla Colony, her “future dream is a job, but family does not allow”. Another woman could not prioritize herself but had to follow the priorities set up by her family:

Whenever I take back work from Ruaab the family say that first do the domestic work, then do this and only if you get time you can do the garment pieces. Otherwise you do not get to do it.

(Karima, Sunder Nagri)

Another woman had to convince her husband to let her work at Ruaab:

My husband was worried for society if they will mock us because his wife is making pieces. So, it took some effort to come here. I used to come here quietly and after collecting the pieces I used to go back home. It took some time to make my husband understand. Now he understands, after one and a half year.

(Nadeeka, New Ashok Nagar)

Research from South Asia have showed that small changes in what can be understood as informal decision-making within the household actually should be considered as a shift in power-relations in which the women are going for a more private form of empowerment that is not challenging the “public image and honor of the traditional decision-maker” (Kabeer 2002: 34f). It is arguable that this is what women at Ruaab is doing, while the public image is kept intact, the women are
taking small steps forward, bargaining for more decision-making possibilities within the household, and as one of the women argued, “money is power”.

**Who is Responsible for the Household work?**

For many women the possibility to earn an income is only because the work is home-based so she can take care of household chores and children at the same time as working. The possibility to earn an income hence puts another burden on them since the division of childcare and domestic chores do not change. Most of the married women have days similar to an ordinary day in Bairavi’s life:

I wake up early morning at 5 o’clock and sweep the floor and make tea for my children and husband and after they drink their tea I tell the children to take a bath and after this I prepares lunch for her children and at 7 o’clock the children goes to school. After that I clean and make lunch for my husband as well. After that I take a bath and do all the household work, washing clothes, washing cookeries and swipe the floor again. All of these things are important. After my daily worshipping […] I come to Ruaab at 10 o’clock or 11 o’clock and at 1 o’clock I am again home for lunch, my own lunch and my husband’s lunch. Then I come back to Ruaab and at 5 o’clock or 6 o’clock I go home again. If there is any urgent work, I do overtime and then I go home. And then I cook and all of this type of work, and if there is urgent work, I also take the pieces home and work, I wake up at 4 o’clock to do piece work.

(Bairavi, New Ashok Nagar)

None of the women discussed the fact that they had sole responsibility for household and that working at Ruaab was adding work burden for them. To be a woman in this context means that the responsibility for both children and household is on you, and this is not openly questioned. A few of the women had also hid the fact that they were making pieces from their husbands because they were afraid that they would not approve. This shows that even if making pieces is added burden, working at Ruaab gives them something, be it the possibility to earn an income, leave the house or meet a supporting network at the centers, something that was seen in the section on collective empowerment.

**Where are you going?**

Only a few of the interviewed women did not have any restrictions regarding their mobility before joining Ruaab, hence their mobility did not change after joining. Only one woman at the New Ashok Nagar center did not experience an increased mobility from joining Ruaab. For the other nine women in New Ashok Nagar the mobility increased:
My mobility has increased since I joined Ruaab. When I was newly married my in-laws did not allow me to go anywhere but after joining Ruaab I now have the confidence and allowance to move around. I can go on the metro and also travel alone to my home-town Agra […] I now have much knowledge of the roads and how to go places, before I did not know where anything was.

(Vadivu, New Ashok Nagar)

Before Ruaab I had restrictions, where are you going? Why are you going? But now, after joining Ruaab I have no restrictions because I have become independent and my family sees my importance and now I go everywhere.

(Haima, New Ashok Nagar)

While the women in the Hindu community in New Ashok Nagar’s involvement in Ruaab mostly led to an increase in mobility, for the women in the Muslim communities of Sunder Nagri and Mulla Colony the process was not as straightforward. Many of the women’s mobility did not change much after joining Ruaab; most of them are allowed to go to the Ruaab center, but they were not allowed to go anywhere else.

I can only come to the center, no other place. […] I do not go alone, some women accompany me when I go to the nearby market or purchase vegetables. And to the market which are far away my husband accompany me and I am only allowed to come to the Ruaab center.

(Saleha, Sunder Nagri)

This is a Muslim community and I am not allowed to move outside. But because of the center I can and if I have work at the center I can go outside [of the community] otherwise I am not [allowed] so the center is kind of an upward mobility.

(Tabasim, Sunder Nagri)

All but three of the women in Mulla Colony and Sunder Nagri said that they were not allowed to move around by themselves. One of the two women who are allowed to move around without company argues that she is lucky that her husband is not controlling as other women’s husbands:

I really like and appreciate my husband and he is very supportive. Other husbands have restrictions and they become controlling, but I am blessed by Allah that my husband is very supportive.

(Yasim, Sunder Nagri)

However, even when women are allowed to move around this is not always well received by the rest of the community and Zafira at Mulla Colony said that “if we are going out somewhere people start backbiting and bullying us”, showing the presence of patriarchal norms also outside of family restricting women’s mobility. She continued by saying that her brothers find her working location
filthy and that “generally Muslims do not prefer their girls to go out like this” but that her parents support her in her work at Ruaab.

When looking at the women who have been the longest with Ruaab (Group C) it becomes clear that their mobility is not greater than any of the other two groups. It should rather be understood as they are having less mobility than the women who have been with Ruaab for a shorter amount of time. The reason for this is of course debatable but it could be that women who have been with Ruaab for 9-12 years belongs to an older generation which are stricter in upholding certain societal norms. Mobility is mixed within the other two groups (A and B) and no clear pattern emerges that the women in one of the groups has greater mobility than the other group.

There is however a difference between the women in New Ashok Nagar area and the women in the areas of Sunder Nagri and Mulla Colony where the Hindu women seem to have greater mobility than the Muslim women. This finding is in line with previous research on Muslim women in India who often are more restricted in their mobility than Hindu women (Kabeer 2002: 29).

**Respect and Support from Family**

Most of the women felt an increase in respect for them in their families after they started working at Ruaab. Some of the women mention income and money as the biggest source of the increase in respect and for getting support.

> Before joining Ruaab I had to cover my face but after joining Ruaab […] I have no restrictions to cover my face.

(Bairavi, New Ashok Nagar)

> The respect has increased because first when I was a housewife, I had no income but now I have income, so I am contributing to household expenses […] when I have money, I have the power to do anything because money is power.

(Padmajai, New Ashok Nagar)

Neither when it comes to respect or support there seems to be a difference between the groups that have worked the longest at Ruaab, where the two women who clearly do not feel supported or respected by their families both had been working at Ruaab since 2011. One of them said:

> If someone calls me sister or respects me, he feels jealous – why I am getting respect and recognition. He thinks that if he does not respect me, others should also disrespect me.

(Jalela, New Ashok Nagar)
For the two women who have been working at Ruaab for the shortest amount of time, two years each, both felt support and respect from their families. Another woman felt support and encouragement from her parents but not from her brothers, showing that the feeling of support is not clear-cut. She has to negotiate between these conflicting views within her family, which also might tap into her self-confidence and sense of agency:

> My brothers told me that I cannot talk to anybody and especially not to boys and that I cannot give opinions about anything in the family.

(Zafira, Mulla Colony)

**Empowerment in Close Relations?**

Women are facing a variety of different problems hindering their empowerment process. It becomes clear that working at Ruaab provides some freedom of movement as well as bargaining power. As one woman puts it, “money is power”, something that was concluded by many women who felt that their respect as well as decision-making in the family had increased with them earning their own income.

So, how is it all connected? Do the women who get to keep their income also have more mobility and get more respect from their family? No clear pattern has emerged that this might be the case. Five of the women have always been comfortable in their mobility, and they also kept their income for themselves, which is the only pattern that emerges from the connection between income and mobility; one woman who gave her salary to her husband felt that she had no mobility while another woman who gave her income to her husband argued that her mobility had increased since she joined Ruaab. However, as already discussed, a clear majority of the women feel that their mobility overall has increased after joining Ruaab.

Empowerment is in this study understood as a women’s ability redefine what they perceive is possible to be and do, something that to some extent ways have been fulfilled in the women’s personal relations. As shown, it does not seem to be any difference between the women who have organized in Ruaab for a longer time, that they have come further in their empowerment process, at least not in her personal relations. It is however arguable that the dimension where change is hardest to achieve is in a women’s personal relations since family norms are robust in India (Kabeer, 1997).
5.3 Personal Empowerment

To have a process of personal empowerment from working at Ruaab there needs to be support for the women to gain self-confidence, achieve a sense of agency, and develop her sense of self. Some changes in behavior that can be seen due to an empowerment process is the increase in ability to formulate and express opinions, the increased ability to obtain and control resources, the increased ability to interact with people outside of home, and an increased sense that things are possible (Rowlands, 1997) Some of these processes are closely interlinked with the other two dimensions: empowerment in close relations and collective empowerment and can hence not be fully separated. The ability to act and fulfill oneself has to do with for e.g. how tightly controlled you are by family and/or how supportive your co-workers are.

Self-Confidence

A clear majority of the women, sixteen out of twenty, felt an increase in self-confidence from working at Ruaab, only four women did not. The women who did not feel an increase in self-confidence had different reasons for this: while one woman argued that she still does not have any confidence, that nothing has changed, three of the women already felt very confident before joining and argued that participation in Ruaab therefore had not increased it.

Since I was ten years old, I have always stood up for myself and I have always stood up for what is right and what is wrong. Just a few days ago I was in a quarrel with an auto-rickshaw driver. He charged more money and I was ready to pick up a fight with him, [even though] my husband was there, I pulled him out by his collar, and I was like, you talk to me, how can you charge more money than what we decided. So, I have always been someone who is outspoken and confident.

(Yasim, Sunder Nagri)

Out of the three women arguing that they always have been confident, two have been working at Ruaab for 10 and 12 years respectively while the third confident women only worked at Ruaab for the last two years. This implies that the women who have been working for Ruaab the longest time not necessarily are those who have gained the most confidence, especially as they themselves argue that they always have been confident. The other two women in group C, the group with women who have been working the longest at Ruaab, argue that their confidence has increased since they joined Ruaab. Haima says that she has had a great increase in her self-confidence and Padmaja argues that she has become more confident from joining Ruaab, but also that she has been a part of Ruaab for 9 years and emphasizes that fear decreases with higher age.
The only woman who did not feel an increase in her confidence, since her work started at Ruaab 8 years earlier, was restricted by her family as where to go and what to do, she said that “I do not have much desires, I know my limitations” (Nadeeka, New Ashok Nagar). Rowlands (1995) talks about “internalized oppression”, in which a woman take the view of the oppressor and hence do not see her own value, but feed into the view of her oppressor, which might be the case with Nadeeka since there is such a clear pattern of confidence among all other women at Ruaab. It also becomes apparent that the different dimensions feed into each other, how her feelings of fear and her reluctance to speak her mind also is connected to her position within her family.

For the women who argued that their confidence increased since joining Ruaab there is not a clear pattern showing that those who have been working with Ruaab for a longer period of time is more confident than the women who started working at Ruaab later. This might imply that, since all women but one, are feeling self-confident, that when joining Ruaab, women who had little self-confidence gain an increase in confidence but that this increase is not enough for women who already felt confident to gain further confidence; working at Ruaab makes the women who did not feel confident before joining to increase their self-confidence.

Many of the women showed similar feelings of increase in self-confidence with the ability and confidence to speak to other people and to have one’s voice heard:

In the beginning I was very reluctant to speak and have a conversation with people but because SEWA gave us the opportunity to go out, in and around Delhi, to meet people I now have the confidence to have a conversation with people. Now I have the confidence even in the house. If somebody asks me to say something I take a stand, […] I have the confidence to speak up for myself.

(Idika, New Ashok Nagar)

One woman felt that her confidence had increased a lot since she started working at Ruaab:

When I went to school I was like a shy, timid girl. I had friends but I was very limited. I went to school and came back, not doing much. Now I have started to speak for myself and I can take a stand and voice my opinion about things.

(Tabasim, Sunder Nagri)

Another woman who has been working at Ruaab for three years feels that her self-confidence still is increasing for each day:

My self-confidence has increased, day by day it increases. Before joining Ruaab I was afraid and had low confidence but after joining Ruaab I have increased confidence and I feel bold and can go anywhere.

(Eesha, New Ashok Nagar)

Another woman talks about how her fear has decreased, how she has been able to travel with Ruaab, something that has made her more confident to use the mobility she has always had:
I had no restrictions but I had fear because I had no knowledge about the roads and whenever I went somewhere I had to go with someone. After joining Ruaab I have built up confidence, I have knowledge about the roads and now I go everywhere alone.

(Bairavi, New Ashok Nagar)

Working at Ruaab have clearly increased the women’s ability to interact with people outside of their family as well as it has helped in developing and expressing opinions. All in all, it has clearly contributed to the women’s increase in self-confidence.

**Obtain and Control Economic Resources**

Income has been discussed in the section on empowerment in close relations. However, income does not only play an important part in the process of empowerment within family, but it is also important in the process of personal empowerment. Malhotral et al., argue: “without women’s individual […] ability to recognize and utilize resources in their own interests, resources cannot bring about empowerment” (2002: 9). As previously discussed, most of the women are allocating their income on their own interests and needs as well as on their children.

The women do not only have the possibility to formulate what they want to buy but also the agency to act on it. The fact that they can obtain and control economic resources shows a great leap forward in their empowerment process. Since not all women are in control of their income, it cannot be seen as a process for all women at Ruaab, but for a majority. However, “[g]iven the social and cultural location of some sources of gender inequality in India, access to economic resources alone is not necessarily sufficient to counter this inequality and to empower women, as their disempowerment is not based only in economics (Kantor, 2003: 426).

**Formulating Desires for the Future**

The increased feeling that things are possible includes planning for the future. Not all the women had formulated plans for their futures and no patterns emerge about the women’s increased feeling that things are possible, or about their future desires, with how long they have worked at Ruaab.

Some of the women were for the first time getting an increase in the feeling that things are possible, and hence start thinking about their own future:

I have confidence to think about my future, before joining Ruaab I had no thoughts about myself, but now I am thinking about my own future.

(Eesha, New Ashok Nagar)
For one of the women it is arguable that her work at Ruaab was a part of her future desire, that she had a desire to learn embroidery and to do something more than housework:

I always wanted to do something apart from taking care of the family […] it is a good way of earning extra money too. It was a passion to do something like this, as I am new to embroidery.

(Saaleha, Sunder Nagri)

However, many of the women do not think about their own future but rather on the future of their children. Even though this can be considered intrinsically good, it is not connected to the women’s own empowerment process. It can however give some indication that the woman is seeing a brighter future, with an increased feeling that things are possible, not only for herself but for her children as well.

**Skill Development**

For most of the women, the skills learnt at Ruaab had mostly to do with embroidery, even though communication skills were frequently mentioned. Many women said that they had learnt more advanced types of embroidery, as well as different designs, how to lock the embroidery properly, and how to make it better quality.

The two quotes below highlights the wide gap of two women’s relation to embroidery, with both feeling that working with embroidery at Ruaab improved their lives:

I already knew all these embroideries. In my village there was a person who used to come and teach the kids, or all the girls, embroidery. It was government people who taught us embroidery. I did not want to learn embroidery, so my mother used to beat me and forcefully send me to learn all the embroidery types, which is helpful to me now because I am earning money. I already knew all these skills but being at Ruaab has taught me how to present myself, how to talk to people, to have a conversation, it has built my personality.

(Idika, New Ashok Nagar)

I already got the training in Wazipur. I spent a lot of money on training and it took lots of effort too. But after marriage I got disconnected, I felt trapped with family and kids. I felt that all efforts I had made to learn these skills were worthless.

(Nadeeka, New Ashok Nagar)

Only one woman felt that she had not learnt any skills during her four years at Ruaab. She also argued that she had no future aspirations or believes in that things were possible: “I do not know anything, no other skills, so I do not think much about it” (Karima, Sunder Nagri). Karo, who works at the same center and who also have been working at Ruaab for the last four years, had a
completely different view of her experience of personal empowerment at Ruaab and how her increase in different types of skills were vital for both her belief in herself and her future:

I can also work, I can also earn, I also have a skill so if I leave him [my husband] I can earn my own living.

(Karo, Sunder Nagri)

These testimonies highlight the wide range of life experiences these women have and how similar experiences can have different results depending on the women’s specific situation, hence influence the empowerment process in different ways.

Who Decides over Time?

One of the cores of personal empowerment is the possibility to decide over one’s time. It became obvious that working at Ruaab puts another burden on women who still have the responsibility for children and household. However, none of the women did explicitly express this as being a problem. It might be that household work is so internalized as a “women’s chore” that they do not reflect over it. However, one of the women answered a question if she believes that the struggles between men and women are different by saying:

In my own family some problems are same, but some are different. Men has full-day jobs and I face different struggles when doing my job because I am also doing household work and taking care of children. Women are superwomen you know. Men also have problems, but different problems.

(Bairavi, New Ashok Nagar)

This quote goes in line with many other women’s, showing that they reflect about the different positions, but it also shows that nothing is put in place to try and change these norms, or that the norms are re-negotiated. It is possible that this is one of the harder norms to challenge. Household work is connected to time because many of the women only work at Ruaab when finding spare time in-between cooking, cleaning and childcare. Even though none of the women are able to freely decide over their time, in many cases, they did gain possibility to decide over part of their time. After joining Ruaab they have had the possibility to decide whether to do their work at the center or to do it at home. Most women stayed to do their work at the center to get support and companionship from the other women also working there.
Personal Empowerment?

Kabeer (1997) shows that in the case of India, what can be considered as agency for women is the possibility to purchase food, major household goods, jewelry, and to make decisions regarding children’s education and what schools they attend. Most of the women at Ruaab who allocate their own income can and do most of these types of decision-making and transactions. Most of the women working at Ruaab have had an increase in self-confidence, increase in agency, possibility to voice opinions and learn new skills. Hence, a clear majority of the women working at Ruaab were in a process of enhancing their personal empowerment. The most prominent part is the increase in self-confidence, the possibility not only to take pride in a skill, to earn money but also to represent a company and be able to converse with people outside of one’s own community, which all together have contributed to a process through which the women can redefine and extend what they perceive is possible for them to be and do in situations where they have been restricted, compared to men, from being and doing (to come back to the definition of empowerment).

6. Conclusion

A problem with measuring empowerment is that there is no clear scale of each process and even though all women in the study comes from a place of disempowerment they all have different starting points in their empowerment process. The aim with the study has been to see if there is a change for the women when joining SEWA’s producer-company Ruaab, if the possibilities of working in a producer-company, part of the global garment industry, can be empowering.

The results show that there are some clear cases of ongoing empowerment processes, but it is however not clear-cut. To, with certainty, say that these women’s empowerment comes from them starting work at Ruaab is hard, especially since the findings do not support this: the women who have been working for Ruaab the longest do not seem to have come further in their empowerment process than the women who have not been with Ruaab for as long. It might however be a measurement issue, that it is the threshold of starting at Ruaab that matters, not the amount of time spent at the company. This does however imply that Ruaab do have positive impact on the women’s empowerment processes.

Empowerment is however not a process that takes place over night, it is a slow process and sometimes it takes generations in order to achieve the needed structural changes. SEWA have established the producer-company’s centers in areas were women are disempowered and where they often lack mobility and possibilities to have their own life outside of the family (sphere). It
becomes clear that SEWA’s work improves many aspects of the women’s life, and hence their work should be considered an enhancing part in the women’s empowerment process.

Previous studies have showed that income not by itself can contribute to personal empowerment. But SEWA, with its alternative model, trying to help women to lift themselves out of their disempowered positions do actually show some potential. The model is very different from other companies or middlemen working in the bottom of the global garment industry. While doing work in a factory or working from home under a middleman will provide an income, the women do not have the possibility of collective agency and to achieve support which also feeds into the process of personal empowerment. The women cannot bargain for increased pay, as they can at SEWA since the middleman most often just finds another woman to do the work.

The literature on empowerment is growing, and with empowerment being a goal within the framework of Agenda 2020, it is bound to increase further. It is important to establish a framework for what empowerment can accomplish and what actually leads to empowerment. SEWA’s work with Ruaab should be considered a bottom-up approach, not top-down as used by many development agencies. The results from this study are hard to generalize to other contexts and different social environments (Bryman, 2011: 352). However, future research could look into if the Ruaab model is possible to adapt as a top-down approach to be used in a different context, in order to achieve a more transparent value chain in the garment industry. This could be desirable for the big fashion companies in a world with a growing focus on human rights and sustainable consumption.

Since no difference could be found that those who have been working at Ruaab for a longer time have come further in their empowerment process, it would be interesting to do a study over time, to interview women in an area where Ruaab are just about to start a new center, to interview them before starting their work as well as after they have been working for a while, to clearly see if there is a difference in the empowerment process by joining Ruaab or an organization with a similar bottom-up approach.

To relate back to the question this study set out to answer, in what ways do participation in SEWA Ruaab impact women’s empowerment process, no coherent answer can be given. To follow Rowlands (1995: 102) argumentation, it is important to differentiate between a ‘situation of empowerment’ and ‘an empowering situation’ where the latter is when not all ‘powers’ are fulfilled and the former where all the conditions are being met. It is hence possible to refer to Ruaab as being an empowering situation for the women but it is not possible to fully see it as a situation of empowerment since, as this study shows, not all conditions have been fulfilled.
Reference List


## Appendix A

Background information of the respondents

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*All names have been changed in order to keep confidentiality*
Appendix B

Interview guide

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<th>Background questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When did you join Ruaab? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What did you do before you joined Ruaab?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How much did you earn before you joined Ruaab? Do you earn less or more today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do you use any of SEWA’s services, for example micro-credits, insurance, or saving schemes?</td>
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</table>

Empowerment in close relations
- Who is in control of your income? Has it changed since you joined Ruaab?
- Has your mobility changed since you joined Ruaab? How has it changed?
- Do you feel that your position in the household have changed since you joined Ruaab? If yes, in what ways?
- Has your decision-making capacity within your family changed since you joined Ruaab? If yes, in what ways?
  - What decisions can you make?
  - What decisions can you not make? Why not?
- Do you feel that you can stand up for yourself and your needs in your close relationships? Has it changed? Give examples
- Do you feel supported by your family? Has it changed since you joined Ruaab?
- Do you feel as if you have the possibility and choice to do what you want to do? Give examples
- What struggles do you face in your everyday life? Do you think men and women’s struggles are different?

Collective empowerment
- Do you feel a sense of group belonging at Ruaab?
- Do you feel that you as a group can get your voices heard?
- Do you feel that your group is valued and respected in the community?
- How would you describe your relation to the other women at the center?
- Do you feel that the group tackles problem as a unit?

Personal empowerment
- Have your self-confidence and/or self-esteem changed since you joined Ruaab?
- Have your aspirations for the future changed since you joined Ruaab? If yes, in what ways?
- Do you feel that you can stand up for yourself and your rights? Has this changed since you joined Ruaab? Give examples
- Do you feel that your position within your family and/or community has changed since you joined Ruaab? If yes, in what ways?
- Have your participation made you more secure in different situations? If yes, give examples
- Have you learnt any new skills since you joined Ruaab? Give examples
- What does a typical day for you look like?