Power Empowerment

by Wati Koesharto

Where does one start when having to write an article featuring the keywords « **Power** » and « **Empowerment** » ?

Lacking inspiration I decided to begin by looking up the meaning of both words in my dictionary [1].

"Power" : besides the obvious words such as power, legal authority, control and (military) command, the main explanatory entry was : *"ability to control people and events, the amount of political control a person or group has in a country".*

"Empowerment" : Right next to the words "enable" and "permit" I read *"to give someone official authority, power, or the freedom to do something".*

Still lacking the obvious inspiration I then decided to look up both words in the Internet's main search engines.

Yahoo and Google's principal returns for the word **"Power"** are *car tuning, horsepower, dietetic products, ninja power, electricity voltage and IT performance related issues.*

Free encyclopaedia Wikipedia gives the following description :

"Power" *has many meanings, most of which imply (a capacity for) control or force (though in physics the terms 'power' and 'force' have different meanings).* It then continues with a rather extended subdivision in the fields of electricity, mathematics, literature etc.

Let us see which hits are returned for the word **"Empowerment"**.

Zigzagging across the pages proposed by the same search engines, I stumble upon words such as *strength, humanity, growth, social change, healing, affordable housing, human development, feminism, support, woman, women.*

Wikipidia is explanation on **"Empowerment"** : *refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It often involves the empowered developing*

confidence in their own capacities. Sociological empowerment often addresses members of groups that social discrimination processes have excluded from decision-making processes through - for example - discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, or gender. Empowerment as a methodology is often associated with feminism.

I cannot help but to feel a somewhat negative connotation when reading the explanations in regards to the word "**Power**" and to feel a positive sort of vibration when reading the explanations given for the word "**Empowerment**".

Perhaps it is me and my predefined view on words and their meaning ?

My busy mind wonders what images it would discover when typing in these same two words ?

Image returns on the word "**power**" : a power helmet, a power glove, a power grid, a power amplifier, a power adapter, a power plate, a power plant, a power circuit and last but not least a very cool sports car. I smile.

Image returns on the word "**empowerment**" : community and NGO logo's, paintings, book covers on the issue, some pictures of men raising awareness for a noble cause and pictures of women from all over the globe fighting for their community, their children, their rights, ... Followed by pictures of women, women and women.

I have a vision of strong male ninja turtles fighting to win on one side and another vision of peacefully and determined marching women holding up empowerment billboards on the other side.

It is almost as if there is a gender division between the two words, "power" obviously being of male gender and "empowerment" having the female gender.

I decide to see for myself what the general views are in my very eclectic circle of friends and travel companions. I asked ten male friends and ten female friends to share with me what came to their mind when hearing the words "power" and "empowerment".

"**Power**" :

Male point of view : money, government, authority, social status, horsepower in cars, legal power. Female point of view : money, ability to change things, to make things different, horsepower in cars, the eternal fight for equality in politics and law, freedom.

"**Empowerment**" :

Male point of view : more horsepower in cars, to pimp up, to make more money, to give more power, (I smile again) to obtain a higher social status, legal power. Female point of view : to believe, to raise self-confidence, to strengthen, to love, to share, to help others. Does the above really necessitate a conclusion ?

[1] Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary