



GLOBAL ACTION PLAN®

What is empowerment?

At an international meeting of researchers and practitioners in Stockholm, we explored this question and arrived at a description with four components.

State	General state
	Specific state
Process	Inner process
	Outer process

Empowerment as a state, or condition

Empowerment is to be found the end of a scale with disempowerment (victim *and* controller) at the other end.

Controller

– aggressive fear

Victim

– abject fear



Each of us occupies a point on that scale, in general; and, we can deviate from that state under particular circumstances. For instance, a generally-disempowered mother can become an empowered tigress if her children are threatened; or a generally-empowered company director can become helplessly disempowered when confronted with sustainability issues.

Empowerment is also another word for freedom. Nelson Mandela is credited with having said

“No-one can take away from me the ultimate freedom, which is the freedom to choose how I will respond to what happens to me.”

After decades in prison, this is a remarkable statement. Maybe few of us can travel that far. But all of us can move in that direction.

Empowerment as a process

Empowerment can also be seen as an inner journey of liberation (or maturation) towards the dolphin state – or indeed, a journey in the opposite direction, of decreasing empowerment, a direction encouraged and abetted by many political and mass medial processes.

The ‘outer’ process is what an empowering person or program can do to support others on the journey of liberation and maturation. In designing such programs, or acting as a coach, we need always to remember that the journey ‘belongs’ to the other: we are there to support them in their needs and decisions.