

Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci. Discuss., referee comment RC2  
<https://doi.org/10.5194/hess-2021-419-RC2>, 2021  
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## Comment on hess-2021-419

Anonymous Referee #2

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Referee comment on "Power and empowerment in transdisciplinary research: a negotiated approach for peri-urban groundwater problems in the Ganges Delta" by Leon M. Hermans et al., Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci. Discuss., <https://doi.org/10.5194/hess-2021-419-RC2>, 2021

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The manuscript focuses on the inclusion of power and empowerment dimensions in stakeholder engagement and transdisciplinary research by combining the latter with the negotiated approach, to address groundwater problems in peri-urban areas. Understanding power and empowerment in this context and applying tools to address relevant issues is illuminating for stakeholder engagement activities and transdisciplinary research. Therefore, this work potentially offers a valuable contribution to this special issue. However, several issues are to be addressed.

### Overarching concerns:

- In the introduction, the 'why' is not clear. I would solidify the significance of the research by addressing questions such as: (1) What does the inclusion of power and empowerment dimensions in TDR bring to the table? (2) What problems exist due to disregarding power and empowerment in TDR?
- I suggest a greater focus on NA. First, since it is a very significant component of the paper, I suggest it's briefly introduced in the introduction. Second, I think it warrants its own subsection. A literature review on how NA is used and what benefits it brought to other studies is lacking. The connection between Table 1 and Table 2 is not clear. A very important component is to know how NA could address power and empowerment challenges faced in TDR. Therefore, the link between both tables should be better elaborated to strengthen the argument and showcase why NA is a good tool for ensuring that power and empowerment are addressed in TDR.
- The objective of the paper is to provide insights from case studies on the impacts of combining TDR with NA on power and empowerment in stakeholder engagement. However, more emphasis on power and empowerment dimensions is needed in sections 3-6. Gender equality was mentioned but how about other power dynamics between stakeholders (e.g. less-literate, low influence vs. high influence actors, etc.). What other power issues were present? What approaches or measures were implemented to reduce these dynamics and accommodate power/empowerment dimensions? These

- were not clearly/sufficiently elaborated.
- Sections 3 to 6 could be better organized/structured.

### **Other comments:**

- I would revisit/rewrite the objective of the paper (Lines 54-57, Page 2). Maybe make it clearer that the paper provides insights from case experiences.
- An elaboration of TDR in the context of human-water systems or water resources management is lacking.
- I suggest you add maps of the study sites.
- Lines 278-279, Page 9: How did this help build confidence? Elaboration is needed since building trust/confidence with villagers is a difficult task and would require more than the selection of a relevant problem. Alternatively, I would rephrase.
- One of the most important aspects of power issues is representation. Therefore, the exclusion of migrants in the Khulna experience is a serious limitation to empowerment/including power dimensions in stakeholder engagement. I think that acknowledging this is important. It also goes back to the design of the process: A stakeholder analysis that prioritizes representation is a crucial first step in ensuring fairness. Is this covered anywhere by the NA/TDR approach?
- Task 1 in Table 3: How were competence or willing indicators identified/assessed? Maybe briefly state in a sentence or two.
- Task 7 in Table 3: not sure what problems a limited project timespan would generate. Maybe elaborate?

### **Grammar/Typos:**

- Articles are missing before words (check throughout) e.g., Task 1, Table 3: "Observe and accept as limitation of project" should be: as A limitation of THE project.
- There is no consistency in using the acronym NA.
- Grammar in tables should be fixed: consistency of phrases (tenses/nouns/etc.) I also suggest the use of bullet points instead of semi-columns.
- Task 1 in Table 3:
  - "Large power distance government decision making and communities (Kolkata)" add between
  - " Existing balance of power and sociopolitical dynamics could not be observed by project team at start of process (neither time nor resources to conduct thorough political study prior to initiating engagement)(Kolkata)" fix grammar
- Task 2 in Table 2: "social arrangements Selecting committed" - separate phrases.
- Typos: "among" Line 51, "genderequality" Line 380