

Helpdesk Research Report: Empowerment, Choice and Agency

Date: 08.08.2010

Query: Please identify literature which discusses the concepts of empowerment, choice and agency. Please include literature from as wide a range of sources as possible, including universities, think-tanks, practitioners, as well as participatory action and research¹. Please highlight the similarities and differences in the ways in which concepts of empowerment, choice and agency are understood. What are the key considerations and constraints to operationalising them and achieving change?

Purpose: To inform strategic thinking on how promoting empowerment and accountability can contribute to achieving development outcomes.

Enquirer: Seema Khan, DFID

1. **Overview**
2. **Literature on empowerment, choice and agency**
3. **Operationalising the concepts**
4. **Additional information**

1. Overview

Empowerment has been understood and operationalised in a variety of ways. There are over 30 definitions of 'empowerment' in current use amongst development scholars and organisations, with a similar tendency for 'agency' (Alkire, 2008). While some organisations leave the term undefined (e.g. UNDP, Oxfam and Save the Children), other organisations lack a clear centralised definition, with different departments interpreting empowerment in various ways.

Different ways in which the concepts of empowerment, choice and agency are understood

Scrutton and Luttrell's (2007) analysis of the differing approaches to empowerment and agency by donor organisations and NGOs is a useful summary of the differing interpretations. The main similarities and differences that the authors observe are:

- **Process vs. outcome** – some organisations view empowerment as both an outcome and a process (SDC, CIDA, DFID, Oxfam), whereas others focus more narrowly on empowerment as a process (USAID, UNDP). Some organisations also prioritise processes that lead people to perceive themselves to be able and entitled to make decision (CARE International).

¹ Please note that literature on empowerment, choice and agency by the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability is already familiar to the Query Enquirer and has therefore not been included in this response.

- **The scope of empowerment** – empowerment is limited to gender issues in some organisations (Sida, CIDA and USAID), whereas other organisations use empowerment for all marginalised groups (DFID and SDC).
- **Agency vs. structure** – some organisations focus on agency (SDC, CIDA and CARE International), whereas others emphasise the importance of reforming structures and political institutions (DFID).
- **The role of outsiders in empowerment** – while some organisations believe outsiders should bring about empowerment (UNDP, USAID), others promote self-help approaches to empowerment (Oxfam, Concern).

Several conceptual frameworks have been developed to explore empowerment, choice and agency, for example IDS's powercube, VeneKlasen and Miller (2002), Narayan (2005) and Alsop, Bertelsen, and Holland (2006). These frameworks are similar in that they all set out to capture the **multidimensionality** of empowerment and the **interrelationships** between the different dimensions of power.

Key considerations and constraints

The diverse ways in which empowerment, choice and agency have been interpreted has in turn led to problems in operationalising the concepts. Cornwall and Brock (2005) have observed that empowerment is not only a 'buzzword', but a 'fuzzword' with multiple meanings. This **fuzziness can be an advantage** for development organisations as it allows for the decentralisation of the term, creativity at the local level and stronger ownership. Indeed, CARE International specifically does not provide an official definition in order not to impose centralised thinking onto operational partners and country offices.

However, having an ambiguous definition of empowerment or none at all also risks a **lack of coherence** across the organisation and **undermines accountability** among the donor, their partners and target groups (Luttrell and Quiroz, 2007). A study of the diverse ways in which World Bank staff understand and implement the concept found that notions of empowerment (as expressed in the World Development Report and other textual commitments) are fragmented at the project level: "there can be no straightforward 'translation into practice' of the Bank's textual commitments to empowerment" (Bebbington et al, 2007, p.614). Some critics also argue that the appropriation of the terms, lack of definition and (mis)use by international development organisations makes it more difficult for critics to disagree with the ideas that underpin empowerment policies or programmes.

It is also clear from the literature that there is a considerable degree of '**conceptual drift**', with the terms empowerment and agency becoming increasingly assimilated. Jay Drydyk observes, however, that empowerment is not simply expanded agency. He notes a key difference between the two terms is that "agency refers to the degree to which a person is autonomously involved in their own activities and group activities in which they participate. This is a state of affairs" (p.13). In contrast, empowerment refers to a process of change – "the process is one of engaging with power, and it is empowering to the degree that people's agency is thereby engaged to expand their well-being freedom in a durable way".

A key consideration in operationalising empowerment is the underlying power dynamics embedded in social relations and the extent to which development agencies are able to understand and address these. In several definitions of empowerment, power is not mentioned. The idea of **power seems to be "remarkably difficult to digest"** in the current development-thinking about empowerment – it is the proverbial 'elephant in the room' (Drydyk, 2010). The contentious issue of power is increasingly being addressed by conceptual frameworks such as IDS's powercube.

It is also important to note that power is not necessarily a zero-sum commodity, whereby one's gain is another's loss (Chambers, 2006). Empowerment can be a win-win solution,

especially in the sense of *power over* and *power within* types of power, described in VeneKlasen and Miller's (2002) classification:

- *Power over* – the most commonly recognized form of power, with negative associations such as repression, force, and coercion..
- *Power to* – the capability to decide on actions and do them (also agency or effective choice)
- *Power with* – finding common ground and collective power through solidarity and working together
- *Power within* – a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge.

Even in the *power over* category, traditionally thought of as negative, it is possible to use 'power over' in ways that are win-win: powerful people can empower (see Chambers, 2006).

A key constraint here is the impact of **organisational culture** on the extent to which any given programme or development agency can empower people. In their review of World Bank development programmes, including a case study from Bangladesh (the 'silk project'), Bebbington et al (2007, p.617) concluded that despite an explicit empowerment aim and NGO involvement, progress was slow due to a resistant organisational culture: "to take empowerment seriously is to go against entrenched values, interests and powers. Even more problematically, the culture of each of the organisations through which empowerment initiatives are pursued is itself embedded in these same values, interests and social relationships". Furthermore, Bank commitment is often "more individual than institutional", making it more difficult to overcome resistance to empowerment from vested interests.

Further consideration should also be given to **psychological barriers** to empowerment. Alsop et al. (2006) have observed that actors need a raised level of consciousness if they are to become 'agents' and translate their assets into choices. Marginalised groups, and women in particular, can become trapped within cultural norms and beliefs whereby they accept low levels of disempowerment: "psychological assets, therefore are particularly important, but often unrecognised, assets in development terms" (p.12).

Research on how empowerment, choice and agency play out in **violent, conflict or post-conflict contexts** is also a gap in existing knowledge.

More research is also needed on **practical entry points** to empowerment (see Oxfam, 2005 and JRF, 2008). Key questions here include: Which interventions are most likely to have the most impact on empowering people and translating this into improved outcomes? Which relationships of power should we focus on? What is the role of external agents? Who creates the need and how long should they stay? What checks and balances need to be put in place to ensure the effectiveness of NGOs and community-led organisations as a vehicle for promoting both individual and collective empowerment? Which approaches to empowerment are the right ones? How do we know we're making a difference?

2. Literature on empowerment, choice and agency

Scrutton, C. and Luttrell, C., 2007, 'The Definition and Operationalisation of Empowerment in Different Development Agencies', *Poverty-wellbeing.net*, Empowerment Note 2 www.poverty-wellbeing.net

This short note provides a useful summary of the differing approaches to empowerment. The authors observe that some organisations leave the term undefined (e.g. UNDP, Oxfam and Save the Children), while other organisations lack a clear centralised definition, with different department interpret empowerment in various ways. The authors compare how the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation's (SDC) definition and operationalisation of

empowerment varies from other donor organisations and NGOs, including: DFID, GTZ, Danida, Norad, Sida, USAID, CIDA, JICA, World Bank, UNDP, UNHCHR, IMF, ActionAid, CARE, Concern, Oxfam, and Save the Children.

The main similarities and differences that Scrutton and Luttrell observe are:

- **Process vs. outcome** – some organisations view empowerment as both an outcome and a process (SDC, CIDA, DFID, Oxfam), whereas others focus more narrowly on empowerment as a process (USAID, UNDP). Some organisations also prioritise processes that lead people to perceive themselves to be able and entitled to make decision (CARE International).
- **The scope of empowerment** – empowerment is limited to gender issues in some organisations (Sida, CIDA and USAID), whereas other organisations use empowerment for all marginalised groups (DFID and SDC).
- **Agency vs. structure** – some organisations focus on agency (SDC, CIDA and CARE International), whereas others emphasise the importance of reforming structures and political institutions (DFID)
- **The role of outsiders in empowerment** – while some organisations believe outsiders should bring about empowerment (UNDP, USAID), others promote self-help approaches to empowerment (Oxfam, Concern).

It should however be noted that empowerment is interpreted and implemented in different ways over time and the differences observed by Scrutton and Luttrell are likely to have moved on since 2007.

Drydyk, J., 2010, 'How to Distinguish Empowerment from Agency' (unpublished)

In this paper, Drydyk observes how the popularity of the terms 'empowerment' and 'agency' have led to 'conceptual drift' and the terms becoming increasingly assimilated. Drydyk cautions against equating empowerment with expanded agency. He notes a key difference between the two terms is that "agency refers to the degree to which a person is autonomously involved in their own activities and group activities in which they participate. This is a state of affairs" (p.13). In contrast, empowerment refers to a process of change – "the process is one of engaging with power, and it is empowering to the degree that people's agency is thereby engaged to expand their well-being freedom in a durable way".

In this sense, agency is just one component of empowerment. The reverse is not true - "empowerment is concerned with agency, but not reducible to it" (p.5). He notes that agency refers to what goes *in to a person's activity*, while empowerment is about *what comes out*. The author makes the observation that, "if the captain of the Titanic tells the passengers that they are now permitted to arrange the deck chairs in any way they wish, this would perhaps expand their agency freedom, but it would not be especially empowering" (p.4).

The author observes that "the idea of power has proven remarkably difficult to digest" in the current development-thinking about empowerment (p. 5) – it is the proverbial 'elephant in the room'. Power does not fit easily into definitions of empowerment since it is not simply a case of 'gaining power'. Using five cases, Drydyk suggests the following conceptualisation: "engagement with power is empowering to the degree that people's agency is thereby engaged to expand their well-being freedom, durably" (p.12). This last word – durably – emphasises the importance of sustainable empowerment.

Cornwall, A. and Brock, K., 2005, 'Beyond Buzzwords: 'Poverty Reduction', 'Participation' and 'Empowerment' in Development Policy', UNRISD, Geneva.
[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/F25D3D6D27E2A1ACC12570CB002FFA9A/\\$file/cornwall.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/F25D3D6D27E2A1ACC12570CB002FFA9A/$file/cornwall.pdf)

This paper looks at how 'empowerment' has come to be used in international development policy, along with two other buzzwords 'poverty reduction' and 'participation'. The authors argue that words are never neutral and that these terms that "once spoke of politics and power have come to be reconfigured in the service of today's one-size-fits-all development recipes, spun into an apoliticized form that everyone can agree with" (p. iii). The document examines how the terms have changed over time and their use in two contemporary development policy instruments, PRSPs and MDGs.

Cornwall and Brock observe how empowerment is a useful concept in policy-statements because like participation and poverty reduction, it is a 'fuzz-word': "their propensity to shelter multiple meanings with little apparent dissonance makes them politically expedient, shielding those who use them from attack by lending the possibility of common meaning to extremely disparate actors" (p.16). Although empowerment may have been co-opted, the authors do not believe that the term should be abandoned. Instead, they argue that empowerment should be reclaimed and linked with other terms in a 'chain of equivalence' – words like social justice, redistribution and solidarity.

Narayan, D., 2002, 'Empowerment and Poverty: A Sourcebook', World Bank, Washington D.C.
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/486312-1095094954594/draft.pdf>

In this empowerment sourcebook, the World Bank presents an analytical framework on empowerment to guide state reform and action. They define empowerment as "the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" (p. vi). It views empowerment broadly as increasing poor people's freedom of choice and agency to shape their own lives.

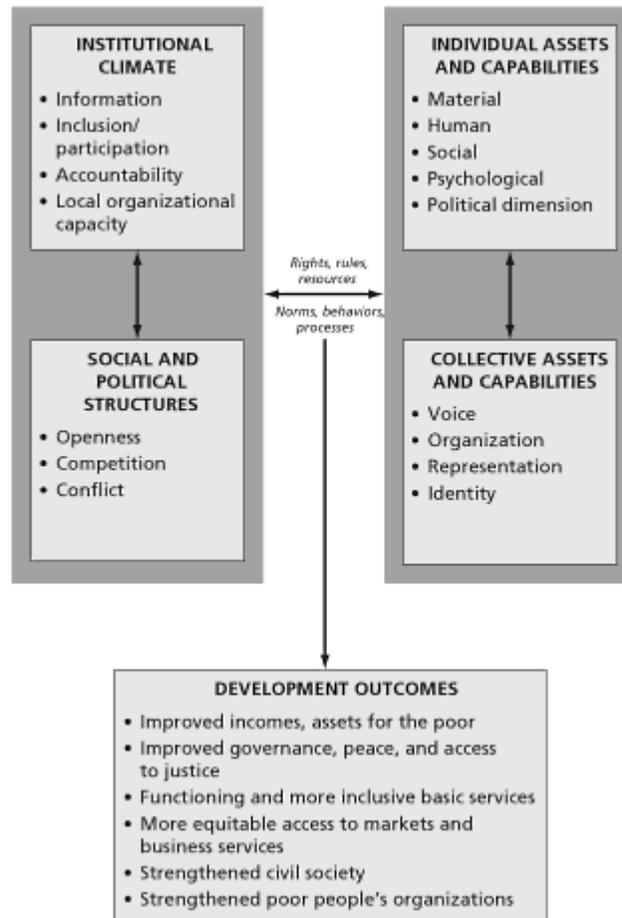
The author identifies four main elements of empowerment: access to information; inclusion and participation; accountability; and local organisational capacity. In any given context, empowerment depends on the nature of social and political structures, on poor people's individual and collective assets and capabilities, and on the complex interaction between these factors.

Narayan, D., 2005, 'Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches', World Bank Publications, Washington D.C.

In this book, the author builds on the framework suggested in the 2002 World Bank sourcebook on empowerment. The conceptual framework proposed consists of four building blocks:

- Institutional change
- Social and political structures
- Poor people's individual assets and capabilities
- Poor people's collective assets and capabilities.

The figure below provides a detailed overview of the conceptual framework, the building blocks and the interaction between them.



Ibrahim, S. and Alkire, S., 2007, 'Agency and Empowerment: A Proposal for Internationally Comparable Indicators', *Oxford Development Studies*, 35/4: 380-403
<http://www3.qeh.ox.ac.uk/pdf/ophiwp/OPHIwp04.pdf>

This article looks at definitions of agency and empowerment, noting that there are over 30 different definitions of empowerment in current use. The authors observe that there are two main components of empowerment: agency (the ability to act on behalf of what you value and have reason to value) and the institutional environment (which offers people the opportunity to 'exert agency fruitfully'). This paper looks at the first component – the expansion of agency.

Ibrahim and Alkire propose a shortlist of indicators for four possible exercises of agency: choice, control, change and communal belonging:

1. Empowerment as control (power over): control over personal decisions
2. Empowerment as choice (power to): domain specific autonomy and household decision-making
3. Empowerment in community (power with): changing aspects in one's life (individual level)
4. Empowerment as change (power from within): changing aspects in one's life (communal level)

VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V., 2002, 'A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation', Practical Action Publishing
<http://www.justassociates.org/ActionGuide.htm>

This Action Guide tackles issues of power, politics and exclusion and suggests practical frameworks and tools. In Chapter 3, the authors focus on power and empowerment and distinguish between four types of power:

- Power *over* – the most commonly recognized form of power, with negative associations such as repression, force, and coercion..
- Power *to* – the capability to decide on actions and do them (also agency or effective choice)
- Power *with* – finding common ground and collective power through solidarity and working together
- Power *within* – a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge.

Later in the chapter, VeneKlasen and Miller identify three further types of power:

- *Visible* power - observable decision-making
- *Hidden* power – setting the political agenda
- *Invisible* power – shaping meaning

The chapter also distinguishes between three realms of power:

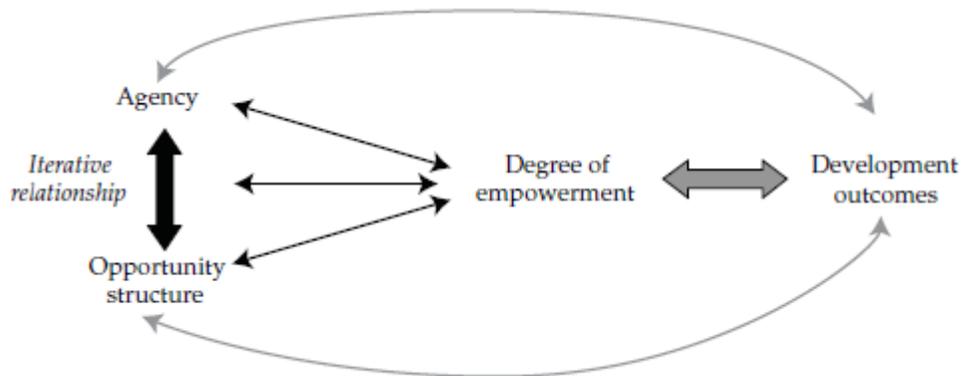
- *Public* realm - the visible face of power as it affects women and men in their jobs, employment, public life, legal rights, etc.
- *Private* realm - relationships and roles in families, among friends, sexual partnerships, marriage, etc.
- *Intimate* realm - one's sense of self, personal confidence, psychology and relationship to body and health.

The authors conclude by suggesting three frameworks for empowerment on pages 55-56. They also note some of the conflicts and risks of empowerment, including the tension, questioning and discomfort that comes with change.

Alsop, R., Bertelsen, M.F. and Holland, J., 2006, 'Empowerment in Practice: From Analysis to Implementation', World Bank, Washington D.C.
www.commdev.org/files/1602_file_Empowerment_in_Practice.pdf

In this paper, the authors propose a framework to understand empowerment and prioritise practical entry points for promoting and tracking empowerment. The authors define empowerment as "a group's or individual's capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes" (p. 10). Agency is defined as "an actor's or group's ability to make purposeful choices - that is, the actor is able to envisage and purposively choose options" (p.10).

The authors propose a relationship between agency, empowerment and development outcomes, shown below. Actors' choices and agency are constrained by their opportunity structure, defined as "the institutional context within which actors operate that influence their ability to transform agency into action" (p.10). The institutional context can be formal (rules, laws and regulatory frameworks) or informal (cultural practices, value systems and norms of behavior).



The framework suggested in this paper assesses empowerment at the different domains of a person's life (the state, market, society) and different levels (macro, intermediary and local). Each domain can be split into sub-domains. The summary matrix provided below also pulls out the agency of the actor and the opportunity structure to explain why an actor is empowered or not, and to what degree.

Domain	Subdomain	Determinants and outcomes																	
		Macro level			Intermediary level			Local level											
		A	OS	DOE	A	OS	DOE	A	OS	DOE									
State	Justice Politics																		
Market	Public service delivery Labour Goods																		
Society	Private services Intra-household Intra-community																		

Note: A= Agency. OS = Opportunity Structure. DOE = Degree of empowerment.

Bebbington, A., Lewis, D., Batterbury, S., Olson, E. and Siddiqi, S.M., 2007, 'Of texts and practices: Empowerment and organisational cultures in world bank-funded rural development programmes', *Journal of development studies*, 43 (4). pp. 597-621
http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/474344_778182312.pdf

This article looks at the diverse ways in which the World Bank has interpreted 'empowerment', in particular the relationship between the Bank's *writings* and the *actions* that take place at project level (text vs. practice). Using the case study of a Silk Development Project in Bangladesh, the authors analyse the 'organisational cultures' of the Bank and the organisations it works with, including government agencies, NGOs, and organisations of the poor.

It presents a framework for analysing these organisational cultures in terms of (a) the broader contexts in which organisations and their staff are embedded; (b) the everyday practices within organisations; (c) the power relations within and among organisations; and (d) the meanings that come to dominate organisational practice. It concludes that Bank commitment to empowerment is "frequently more individual than institutional, making it more likely that resistance strategies will be successful" (p. 616).

Alkire, S., 2008, 'Concepts and Measures of Agency', OPHI Working Paper Series, Working Paper No. 9., Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, Oxford
<http://www3.qeh.ox.ac.uk/pdf/ophiwp/OPHIwp09.pdf>

This paper uses Amartya Sen's concept of agency to examine some of the different ways of measuring agency at the individual or household level. Sen describes agency as a person's ability to act on behalf of what he or she values and has reason to value. Alkire makes four conceptual distinctions in order to broaden measurement of agency beyond traditional proxy measures such as literacy, members of organisations, land ownership etc. She proposes four additional issues for measuring agency:

- (1) *Domains of capability*, including for example work and livelihoods, childbearing, marriage, children's education, consumption, health actions, and politics.
- (2) *Effective power and control* – measures of agency should be able to differentiate between direct control by the person or group and effective power.
- (3) *Advancing other-regarding goals*, which may not necessarily advance an agents' own well-being. Agency should not be limited to people advancing 'their own interests' either individually or collectively, but should extend to other-regarding goals such as saving rainforests.
- (4) Distinguishing between *autonomy* measures and those that focus on *ability*. Autonomy looks at whether people are able to act on behalf of what they themselves *value*, whereas ability refers to whether people are able to act on behalf of things that they are assumed to *have reason to value*. In practice, these are often identical, but Alkire argues that it is important to have empirical measures for both autonomy and ability.

The Powercube

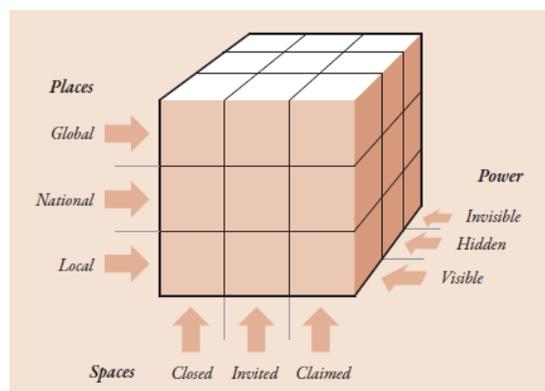
<http://www.powercube.net/>

Accompanying document: 'Power Pack: Understanding Power for Social Change'

http://www.powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/PowerPack_web_version.pdf

The 'power cube' approach to power analysis was developed by the Institute for Development Studies and is described on www.powercube.net and the accompany Power Pack document. The power cube illustrates the spaces, places and forms of power and their interrelationship. It incorporates three dimensions of power –

- *levels* (global, national and local);
- *spaces* (closed, invited and claimed/created); and
- *form* (hidden, invisible and visible).



Like a Rubik's cube, the blocks can be rotated in any number of ways. It is an analytical device that has been used in a number of places. Examples are provided on the website and

include: Community-Driven Development in Liberia; Kenyan constitutional reform; and Afghan refugees in Japan. The website also discusses other approaches to power.

3. Operationalising the concepts

Luttrell, C. and Quiroz, S. with Scrutton, C. and Bird, K., 2009, 'Understanding and Operationalising Empowerment', ODI Working Paper 308, ODI, London
<http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/4525.pdf>

This paper for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) provides an overview of the different definitions of and conceptual approaches to empowerment. In their review of the history of the debates surrounding empowerment, the authors observe that:

- the term 'empowerment' does not translate easily or equally to other languages
- many organizations only use the term within the remit of gender issues
- the popularity of the term has led to some critiques suggesting that the emphasis on personal and collective struggle has been diluted.

These debates have various operational implications, for example:

- Is empowerment a process or an outcome?
- How is power understood? The table on page 8 looks at the operational implications of different definitions of power in relation to different assets, with reference to DAC poverty capabilities
- Agency vs. structural approach. The authors note that "care should be taken not to overemphasise the separation between structure and agency and that attention should be paid to a combination and a sequencing of both forms of approach" (p.10).
- Decentralisation of empowerment - the issue of whether organizations should leave empowerment to be loosely defined to allow for the term to be adapted to the local context and increase ownership.
- The importance of taking a multidimensional approach and recognizing both individual capacities and collective action are needed to address inequalities that are the cause of poverty.

Eyben, R., Kabeer, N. and Cornwall, A., 2008, 'Conceptualising Empowerment and the Implications for Pro Poor Growth', A paper for the DAC Poverty Network, IDS, Brighton
<http://www.ids.ac.uk/index.cfm?objectid=3971D3FA-E0D0-E6A1-174C0169D5AF39AE>

This paper proposes a framework for how empowerment can be conceptually understood and operationally explored. The authors note that although empowerment is fundamentally about power, the word 'power' is contentious, sometimes even threatening, in the development discourse – "in some bilateral aid organisations, the word may trigger alarm, particularly when going beyond the analysis of formal political institutions to exploring informal power that is dispersed throughout society and operates in all relationships" (p.5). The authors note that power should not be viewed as a resource that can be possessed, acquired or lost, but rather than "as part of all social relationships and institutions, shaping the limits of what is possible for people to do or to envisage themselves doing" (p.5).

Eyben, Kabeer and Cornwall examine the different facets of social, economic and political empowerment, but pays particular attention to economic empowerment as an entry point because of the experience and research that POVNET has in this sphere. The authors note that changes in one sphere (e.g. changes in financial institutions enabling people to procure loans) do not necessarily trigger changes in other spheres (e.g. local politics or at the

household level). Donors should consider which interventions can have a multiplier effect in other social and political spheres leading to pro-poor growth.

Oxfam GB Horn/East Africa Regional Pastoral Programme, 2005, 'Capacity Building for Empowerment Workshop Report', 6-8 March

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/pastoralism/downloads/cbe_workshop.pdf

This workshop report discusses the role and effectiveness of Oxfam, its partners and other change agents in capacity building for empowerment in the regional pastoral programme in Horn/East Africa. It raises interesting questions about the challenges of operationalising empowerment, for example:

- Which relationships of power should we focus on, given limited capacity and resources? But if relationships of trust are to be built, then Oxfam also needs to work proportionally with all groups concerned?
- How can all the various actors develop a common vision?
- It takes time to build deep changes
- How can Oxfam help those in power (governments/men/external agencies/elders) play an active role in empowering others?
- How to build challenging, but supporting, relationships with relevant government departments?
- How to build consciousness amongst communities?
- What checks and balances need to be put in place to ensure the effectiveness of NGOs and community-led organisations as a vehicle for promoting both individual and collective empowerment?
- What is the role of external agents, such as Oxfam, in strengthening these organisations? Who creates the need? How long to stay? Which approaches are the 'right'?
- How do we know we're making a difference?

Oosterom, M., 2010, 'Understanding Social Agency in Complex and Violent-Prone Settings Literature Review', For the Power, Participation and Social Change Team (PPSC), IDS Brighton

This document informs a new 3-year research initiative, 'Understanding Social Change in Complex and Violent-Prone Settings' in the Participation, Power and Social Change Team at IDS. To follow up on this project, which is currently in the design phase, please contact the lead research fellow, Rosemary McGee (r.mcgee@ids.ac.uk). In her review of the literature on agency, social agency, violence and conflict, Oostertom observes that agency usually refers to 'human agency' of individuals rather than 'social agency'. Examples of collective forms of agency are piecemeal and do not yet form a coherent theory of social agency in complex and violent-prone settings. She concludes that this lack of theory on what makes social agency possible in these settings is a gap in existing knowledge.

San Pedro, P., 2006, 'Empowerment in Practice: Post-conflict Scenarios', FRIDE Development 'In Perspective, FRIDE, Madrid

<http://www.fride.org/publication/36/empowerment-in-practice:-post-conflict-scenarios>

In this note on empowerment in post-conflict scenarios, FRIDE (an independent think-tank based in Madrid), identifies the difficulty in monitoring and evaluating changes in empowerment, particularly for conflict prevention and peace building. It provides a set of tools to promote empowerment according to different dimensions: economic; institutional; socio-cultural; personal; psychological; and organisational.

The paper also highlights the importance of considering the potentially negative impact of power distribution in post-conflict settings and developing mechanisms within M&E systems to take this into account. For example, women receiving a micro-credit in a conflict rehabilitation phase may be empowered economically, but may be at risk of gender violence at the household level, have a heavier workload and greater responsibility. The author notes that: "Interventions must not only consider the results, but also the effects that it could have over individuals and society in the long-run" (p. 3).

Adamson, D. and Bromiley, R., 2008, 'Community Empowerment in Practice: Lessons from Communities First', Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/community-empowerment-practice-lessons-communities-first>

This study looks at the Communities First regeneration programme in Wales, a community-based programme that aims to increase opportunities for community empowerment and potential influence over service providers. The research looks at five years of experience in nine case studies. The Communities First partnership had an important impact at the community level, with people feeling more confident in their abilities and bringing skills and knowledge to the participation process. However, the researchers concluded that community empowerment failed to affect change in public service provision, despite the support mechanisms and a 'strong steer from government'.

The paper notes that community members' roles were strengthened by providing multiple routes to participation, such as sub-ward communities, themed interest groups or ward-wide community forums. These range of forums provided "alternative and less formal routes for engagement and created learning opportunities for community members to develop a participation career" (p.2). The Welsh study points to a model of community empowerment that starts at a highly localised level (of sub-ward), feeding up into community forums, then ward-based partnerships, which then interact with county-level forums (such as Local Strategic Partnerships or Local Service Boards).

Chambers, R. (2006) 'Transforming Power: From Zero-sum to Win-Win' in IDS Bulletin 37 (6), Institute of Development Studies, Brighton

<http://community.eldis.org/.59b4ab37/zerosum.pdf>

In this paper, Chambers presents the concept of 'uppers' (a person who in a context is dominant or superior to a lower in that same context) and 'lowers' (a person who in a context is subordinate or inferior to an upper in that same context). He uses VeneKlasen & Miller's framework of power over/to/with/within (described earlier) and argues that power *over* does not need to be zero-sum: one's gain does not have to be another's loss. Instead, uppers can use their power over to empower in a win-win solution. The author identifies changes in mindsets and behaviour, with actions to empower including: change behaviour and relationships; convening and catalysing; facilitating; coaching and inspiring; asking questions; brokering and supporting others.

Chambers notes that most of the better-known development initiatives have sought to empower through *power within* and *power with*. Although Chambers agrees that these approaches are primary and should remain so, he argues that it is time for a complementary discourse that evolves and applies a "pedagogy for the powerful" to help them reflect and change – uppers like the staff of aid agencies and NGOs, political leaders, officials, priests, teachers and professional service providers. He suggests five areas of activity and innovation: (1) workshops, retreats and reflection; (2) training to facilitate – all development

professionals should be trained in facilitation; (3) face-to-face direct experience; (4) peer influence between the powerful; and (5) well-being.

4. Additional information

Author

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Selected websites visited

Google, GSDRC, World Bank, Oxford Policy Management, Overseas Development Institute, Oxford Policy and Human Development Initiative, Brooks World Poverty Institute, UNRISD, IDS, Ethics of Empowerment, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, FRIDE Think Tank,

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