Overseas Development Institute

Understanding and operationalising empowerment

Cecilia Luttrell and Sitna Quiroz,
with Claire Scrutton and Kate Bird

Working Paper 308

Results of ODI research presented in preliminary form for discussion and critical comment

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November 2009

Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE7 1JD

ww.odi.org.uk

ISBN 978 1 907288 03 6
Working Paper (Print) ISSN 1759 2909
ODI Working Papers (Online) ISSN 1759 2917

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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
Danida	Danish International Development Agency
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EC	European Commission
FRIDE	Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior
GAD	Gender and Development
GP	Gram Panchayat (local government unit in India)
GTZ	German Development Cooperation
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IC	Intercooperation
ICT	information and communication technology
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFI	International Finance Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SHG	Self-help Group
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UNDP	UN Development Program
UNHCHR	UN High Commission for Human Rights
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
USAID	US Agency for International Development
VDS	Village Development Society
WID	Women in Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

Acknowledgements

This paper was commissioned by the Social Development Division of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The authors would like to thank Laurent Ruedin and Reto Wieser for their important contribution and guidance, and Roo Griffiths, Francesca Iannini, Jo Adcock and Josie Tucker for their editorial support. Useful comments and input were provided also by Jane Carter, Maya Tissafi and Martin Fischler. Responsibility for the opinions expressed in this report, and any errors, are the authors' alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) or SDC.

1. Introduction

This paper presents an overview of the different definitions of and conceptual approaches to empowerment. It was produced for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) following publication of an independent evaluation of SDC's application of empowerment approaches in its development programming.

Discussions around empowerment are commonly limited to activities associated with 'economic', 'social' and 'political' empowerment (see Box 1). Transforming power relations does require intervention in these different dimensions and levels, but this paper takes the debate beyond such a sectoral approach to explore a number of conceptual issues that have practical implications for the operationalisation of empowerment. The main issues covered by the paper include:

- The recent history of the use of the term 'empowerment' in development;
- Different definitions and conceptual approaches to empowerment; and
- Various operational implications of these debates, including whether empowerment is viewed as a process or an outcome; how power operates; strategies for inclusion; and implications of working on empowerment with partners.

Box 1: Various dimensions of empowerment

Economic empowerment
Economic empowerment seeks to ensure that people have the appropriate skills, capabilities and resources and access to secure and sustainable incomes and livelihoods. Related to this, some organisations focus heavily on the importance of access to assets and resources.

Human and social empowerment
Empowerment as a multidimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. This is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities and their society, by being able to act on issues that they define as important (Page and Czuba, 1999).

Political empowerment
The capacity to analyse, organise and mobilise. This results in the collective action that is needed for collective change. It is often related to a rights-based approach to empowerment and the empowering of citizens to claim their rights and entitlements (Piron and Watkins, 2004).

Cultural empowerment
The redefining of rules and norms and the recreating of cultural and symbolic practises (Stromquist, 1993). This may involve focusing on minority rights by using culture as an entry point.

2. The history of debates surrounding empowerment

Since the 1980s, the theme of empowerment has become central to the work of many development organisations. SDC (2004) conceptualises empowerment as an emancipation process in which the disadvantaged are empowered to exercise their rights, obtain access to resources and participate actively in the process of shaping society and making decisions. However, there is a range of definitions and approaches used by different organisations (see Annex. To some, empowerment is a political concept that involves a collective struggle against oppressive social relations. To others, it refers to the consciousness of individuals and the power to express and act on one's desires. These differences stem from the many different origins and uses of the term.

In addition to these differences, the term 'empowerment' does not translate easily or equally. The Spanish word *empoderamiento* implies that power is something provided by a benefactor to a beneficiary, a clear example of 'power over' (see Table 1, which explores different types of power relations). According to the dictionary, *empoderar* is an obsolete word. Garcia Moreno (2005) asks why *empoderamiento* is used as the translation by development agencies instead of *apoderamiento* or *fortalecimiento*, which come from verbs in current use. He suggests that the term *empoderamiento* allows the perpetuation of an ambiguous discourse, permitting institutions with different ideologies to establish their own agendas. Bucheli and Ditren (2001) describe how one workshop discussion in Nicaragua led to a consensus that the term *participación social'* better reflects the English use of the word. In both German and French, the English 'to empower' can be translated into two different verbs: *ermächtigen/autoriser* (which suggests 'power over') on the one hand, and *befähigen/rendre capable* ('power to') on the other. There are other possibilities for a French translation: the Quebec French dictionary uses the word *autonomisation*; the World Bank (2000, in Doligez, 2003) uses the words *demarginalisation* and *intégration*. Empowerment is also found in the literature as *renforcement des capacities* and *participation* (Doligez, 2003). In order to promote a common understanding on empowerment, both terms may be necessary to encompass not only the formal, legal strengthening of entitlements, but also the *capacity* to make practical use of these formal entitlements.

The roots of thinking on empowerment lie in feminist theory and popular education, which stressed the personal and inner dimensions of power

The two main alternative roots of influence to the empowerment 'philosophy' today appear to be the work of Paolo Freire and the feminist movement. The concept of 'popular education' of Paolo Freire was developed in the 1960s and became influential in development in Latin America in the 1970s, associated particularly with literacy projects (Freire, 1970). In the 1980s, empowerment was seen, for the most part, as a radical project of social transformation, to enable otherwise excluded social groups to define and claim their rights collectively.

Table 1: Implications of different dimensions of power

Type of power relation	Implications for an understanding of empowerment
Power Over: ability to influence and coerce	Changes in underlying resources and power to challenge constraints
Power To: organise and change existing hierarchies	Increased individual capacity and opportunities for access
Power With: increased power from collective action	Increased solidarity to challenge underlying assumptions
Power from Within: increased individual consciousness	Increased awareness and desire for change

Source: Rowlands (1997).

The actual term 'empowerment' was first commonly used in association with the women's movement, within a discourse of feminism that drew on the influence of popular education and focused on the role

of the individual in politics.[1] In contrast with other debates in feminism, which are dominated by Northern thinking, much of the writing on empowerment and gender emerged from the South. In the mid-1980s, the 'empowerment of women' became an important part of the debate on gender and development. It has had much influence in subsequent wider development thinking. The concept of empowerment was propelled further by feminist critiques of development. The Women in Development (WID) approach, which sought to include women in development for efficiency purposes, was now accused of not questioning the underlying reasons for female subordination.

Empowerment is associated with the gender and development approach and challenging the way in which the inclusion of women in the development process can increase their work burden

The gender and development (GAD) approach, which developed in reaction to the WID approach, was concerned with the way in which the inclusion of women in the development process increased their work burden or displaced it elsewhere in the family. In so doing, the GAD approach explicitly addressed the dynamics of gender relations and social context, value systems and, above all, power. Empowerment was very much connected to the emerging GAD approach, with its associated actor-orientated and bottom-up methods.

Owing to a heavy association with gender, many organisations only use the term 'empowerment' within the remit of gender issues. Others, however, are clear that empowerment not only is a gender issue but also concerns a whole host of marginalised groups, encompassing a range of social differentiations such as caste, disability and ethnicity. For example, SDC works on empowerment of minority Roma groups in Serbia and Montenegro in order to integrate them equally into the official education system, at the same time as keeping their identity and cultural heritage alive.[2]

Empowerment in the black and civil rights movement of the US was understood mainly in terms of racial empowerment through the growing influence of African Americans in political and social participation (Calhoun-Brown, 1998). Similarly, recent ethnic minority movements, such as the indigenous organisation Inca Atahualpa in Ecuador, have been analysed with an empowerment perspective that emphasises the political role these movements play in articulating demands for the recognition of those such as the Quechua population (Cervone, 1997).

In the 1990s, with increasing democratisation in Latin America and the retreat of the state, notions of participation and empowerment, previously the reserve of social movements and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), were reformulated and become a central part of the mainstream development discourse (Van Dam et al., 1992). At the same time, the term 'empowerment' was enthusiastically adopted by international development agencies, influenced by the ideas of Sen (1992) and the promotion of his 'capabilities approach'. However, many schools of Latin American literature today associate empowerment with neo-liberal policies and the World Bank's development agenda in the region (Caccia Bava, 2003). Some authors see empowerment as an attempt to co-opt social movements and popular initiatives for democracy (Larrea, 2005). Others feel that excess enthusiasm for empowerment, adopted by some international NGOs that work with and support social movements in the region, has had a detrimental effect on the consolidation of democratic institutions that are able to build consensus (Toranzo, 2006).

The view of empowerment in some of the French literature is equally critical. Authors such as Olivier de Sardan (1992) and Grignon and Passeron (1989) discuss the ambivalence between *populisme* (as seen in writers such as Chambers (1983) who idealise the poor) and *misérabilisme* (those who devalue the capacities of the poor, and therefore advocate for interventions of outsiders on their behalf). Olivier de Sardan's critique of the populist approach refers to the ambiguity and depoliticisation of terminology,

[1] According to the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE, 2006), the current use of the term 'empowerment' actually appeared for the first time in the book Black Empowerment by Salomon (1976), where it was used to describe a social work methodology with marginalised African-American communities.
[2] See http://www.swisscooperation.org.yu/en/Home/Our_Programme_Lines/Education/IFRC_Social_Welfare_Programme.

for example in the categorisation of the 'poor' as moral, and the tendency to project simple stereotypes (discussed further in Brown, 1998).

Lack of attention to underlying structural causes of disempowerment has led to criticism, and a weakening of the concept

The recent popularity of the concept of empowerment has brought wide concern that the focus has not brought about any fundamental changes in development practice. Some critiques go further, suggesting that the use of the term allows organisations to say they are tackling injustice without having to back any political or structural change, or the redistribution of resources (Fiedrich et al., 2003). Many claim that the emphasis on personal and collective struggle has been diluted: 'the dissonant elements fell away as it came to join words like "social capital" as part of a chain of equivalence that stripped it of any political potency' (Cornwall and Brock, 2005). The authors point out the irony lying in the fact that the feminist emphasis on the politics of the personal and the neo-populist agenda have been readily taken up by those advocating the positive role of individualism and free market ideology.[3] Empowerment's wholehearted adoption by the World Bank has added to this suspicion.

[3] Others take this further to suggest that the empowerment agenda has become a means to control the social protests and movements of those whose lives have been negatively affected by neo-liberal trends (Falquet, 2003; Lautier, 2001).

3. Empowerment as a process or an outcome?

Many view empowerment as both a process and an outcome. Others take only an instrumentalist view of empowerment, focusing more narrowly on the importance of process. On the other hand, those who take a transformative approach question the way in which participation alone can be empowering without attention to outcomes. These distinctions have obvious operational implications. An emphasis on process leads to a focus on organisational capacity building or an increase in participation of previously excluded groups in the design, management and evaluation of development activities. An emphasis on outcomes leads to a focus on economic enhancement and increasing access to economic resources.

Moving beyond mere participation in decision making to an emphasis on ***control***

A framework developed by Longwe (1991) provides some useful distinctions between different degrees of empowerment (with the numbered list below moving up towards increased empowerment):

1. The **welfare** 'degree': where basic needs are satisfied. This does not necessarily require structural causes to be addressed and tends to view those involved as passive recipients.
2. The **access** 'degree': where equal access to education, land and credit is assured.
3. The **conscientisation and awareness-raising** 'degree': where structural and institutional discrimination is addressed.
4. The **participation and mobilisation** 'degree': where the equal taking of decisions is enabled.
5. The **control** 'degree': where individuals can make decisions and these are fully recognised.

The Longwe framework stresses the importance of gaining *control* over decisions and resources that determine the quality of one's life and suggests that 'lower' degrees of empowerment are a prerequisite for achieving higher ones.

4. Understanding power

Achieving empowerment is intimately linked to addressing the causes of disempowerment and tackling disadvantage caused by the way in which power relations shape choices, opportunities and wellbeing. There is a range of debates about the concept and operation of power and its operation, which results in a variety of interpretations of empowerment. Again, insights from gender theory into the empowerment debate have increased clarity over this issue, most notably that power is about more than just 'power over' people and resources. Rowland's (1997) categorisation of power is of great analytical and practical use here. She categorises four types of power relations to stress the difference between **power over** (ability to influence and coerce) and **power to** (organise and change existing hierarchies), **power with** (power from collective action) and **power within** (power from individual consciousness) (see Table 1).

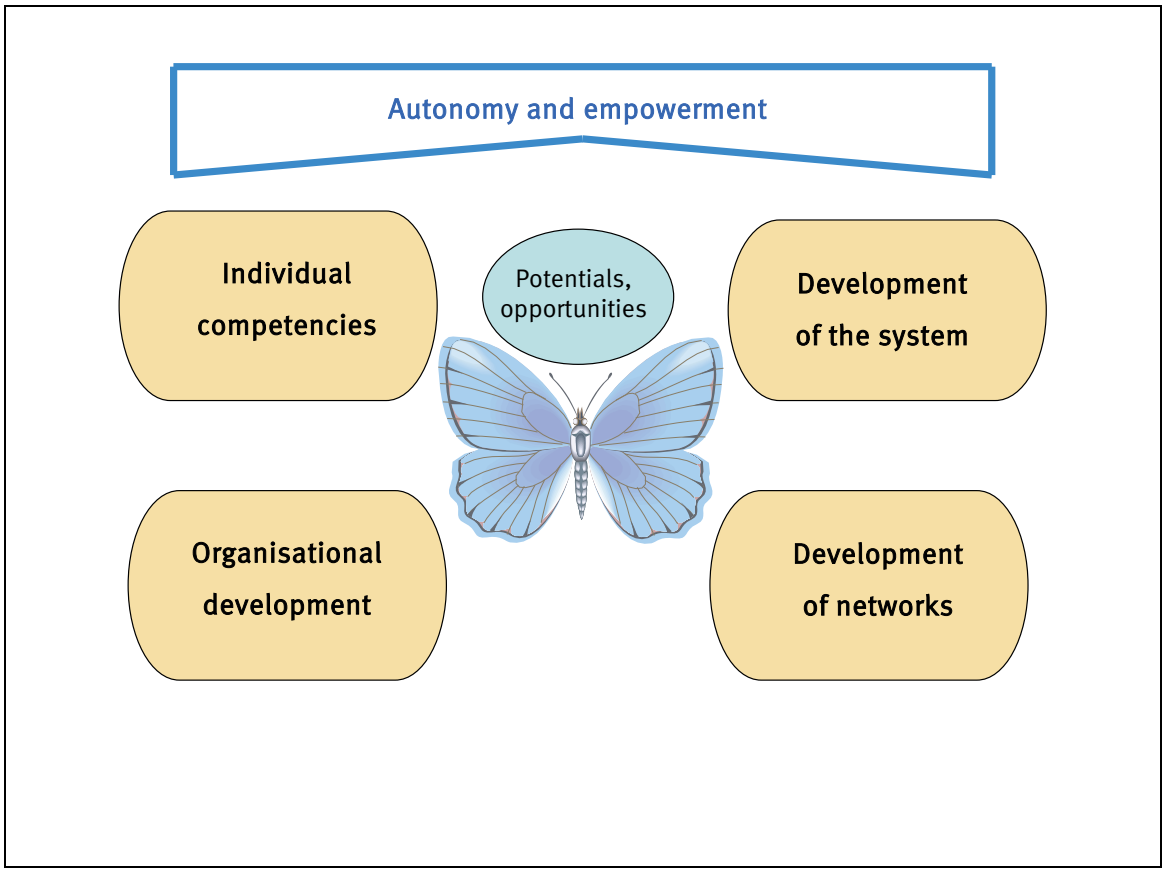
Empowerment based on a view of power as **'power over'** emphasises the need for participation in existing economic and political structures but does not involve changes to those structures. If power is defined as **'power over'**, it is seen as something that is wielded by those who are dominant and can be bestowed by one person on another. It is also seen to be in finite supply ('zero sum') and that the only way to gain it is to take it from the more powerful. For example, a zero-sum approach to political empowerment might focus on increasing the political representation of the poor relative to the rich, so that voting rates are inclusive and representatives who reflect poor people's interests are elected. One way of doing this is through public financing of campaigns and secret ballots to stop the non-poor from dominating political processes. A 'positive-sum' approach, on the other hand, would focus on increasing political participation and the demands that voters have on political candidates over the management of public interests and policies (Knack, 2005). The feminist approach emphasises that empowerment 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 (or 'cake') that power brings should not reproduce social inequalities or restrict the rights of others (Kabeer, 2001a).[4]

'Power with' stresses the way in which gaining power actually strengthens the power of others rather than diminishing it, as occurs with power over. This raises the distinction between personal and collective empowerment. However, definitions of empowerment are often couched in individualistic terms, with the ultimate aim being to increase individual choice and capacity for self-reliance.

The CapDev Butterfly (see Figure 1) makes a distinction between competencies accruing to the individual, to the group and to organisations, as well as to networks and systems. The metaphor of the butterfly is effective, as it shows the need for attention to *all* of these components for empowerment to be achieved. Collective and organisational development may depend not only on individuals' competencies but also on relationships with other institutions. Poor women, for example, may not be able to participate in 'collective' empowerment activities before they are able to tackle the power dynamics at the household level that constrain them. For many, however, collective organisation is seen as an essential element of empowerment. Oakley (2001) stresses the importance of 'apex-organisation building', where networks and alliances are able to connect vertically to enable lobbying for marginalised groups at higher levels, and in so doing can bring about the 'institutionalisation' of legally based rights.

[4] Equally, just as if women can be empowered without disempowering men, men could be freed from the image of being an oppressor (Batliwala, 1995).

Figure 1: The CapDev Butterfly, emphasising the importance of coordinating the various scales at which empowerment can occur



Source: SDC (2006).

'Relational' empowerment moves beyond the concept of individual or collective empowerment to include a consideration of the importance of individuals (or groups) developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationships with other institutions.

A focus on **'power to'** has led to an emphasis on access to decision making, whereas an emphasis on **'power within'** has led to a focus around building self-esteem. The process of acquiring such power must start with the individual and requires a change in their own perceptions about their rights, capacities and potential.

Table 2 teases out some of the operational implications of the different definitions of power in relation to different assets, with reference to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) poverty capabilities (DAC, 2001).

Table 2: Examples of outcomes on assets (capabilities) of the different definitions of power at a variety of scales (individual, household, group, etc.)

Type of power relation	Economic capability	Human and social capability	Cultural and psychological capability	Political and legal capability	Protective capabilities
Power Over: the ability to coerce and influence the actions and thoughts of the powerless	Women gaining increased control over income from loans, saving and household production. Ethnic minorities increase their ability to challenge discrimination in access to resources and markets. Wives gain control over productive assets and property.	Women increase control over household consumption and decision making.	Immigrant groups are able to challenge cultural perceptions at community and household levels.	Involvement of ethnic minorities in formal decision making. Engagement with positions of authority by low-caste groups.	Children increase their individual ability to defend against violence.
Power To: the capacity to act, to organise and change existing hierarchies	New immigrants increase their access to income and microfinance. The burden of unpaid work and childcare on women is reduced.	Increased literary skills among Afro-Caribbean boys. Improved health and nutrition status among those with HIV. Urban migrants increase their awareness of, and access to, public welfare services.	Increased mobility and access beyond household for the disabled.	Knowledge of legal and political processes and removal of formal barriers suffered by low-caste groups.	The reduction of risk, vulnerability and insecurity for the over-70s.
Power With: increased power from collective action, social mobilisation and alliance building	International women's groups collectively challenge discrimination.	NGO coalitions develop joint action for increased public welfare provision.	Increased status and dignity among *dalit* groups.	Participation in movements by informal sector workers to challenge subordination. National networks of community forestry groups lobby for their interests.	Access to networks by the disabled which provide support in times of crisis. Joint action ethnic minorities groups to defend others against abuse.
Power from Within: increased individual consciousness, self-dignity and awareness	Increased levels of self-esteem and recognition of individual economic contribution among immigrant groups. Desire by women for equal rights to resources.	Increased confidence and happiness of the over-70s. Desire by the disabled to take decisions about self and others. Desire by informal sector workers for equal wellbeing.	Increased assertiveness, self-esteem and sense of autonomy among sex workers. Recognition of the need to challenge cultural subordination by *dalits.*	Desire of immigrants to engage in cultural, legal and political processes. Recognition of the need among ethnic minorities to challenge legal discrimination and political exclusion.	Increased resilience for low-income groups to shocks, disasters, economic crises.

5. The agency approach versus an emphasis on structure

At the root of these different categorisations of power is the debate about whether change is brought about or constrained by forces beyond peoples' control (social structures such as class, religion) or through individual and collective action (agency) (see Box 2). On the one hand, some people argue that individual people have a great capacity for acting freely. On the other hand are those who argue that social systems greatly constrain, or determine, the actions of individuals. Many dismiss this dichotomy and claim that structure and agency are complementary and dynamic forces: structure influences human behaviour, and humans are capable of changing the social structures they inhabit.

Box 2: Agency and structure explained

The term **'agency'** refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices. The term **'structure'** covers the rules and social forces (such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, customs, etc.) that limit or influence the opportunities that determine the actions of individuals.

Much thinking about empowerment originated at the grassroots level and was based on the core elements of agency and the importance of self-esteem. Many writers lay a special emphasis on self-respect: 'There is a core to the empowerment process which consists of increases in self-confidence and self-esteem, a sense of agency and of "self" in a wider context, and a sense of *dignidad* (being worthy of having a right to respect from others)' (Rowlands, 1997). This led to a focus on transformation through education and organisational capacity building.

More recently, however, there has been increased recognition of the need for an explicit consideration of structural inequalities that affect entire social groups rather than a focus only on individual characteristics. It is this focus that is often combined with a rights-based approach. The operational implications of these different approaches are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparing objectives from an agency and a structural perspective

Type of power relation	An 'agency' approach to empowerment	Transforming 'structures' for empowerment
Power Over: the ability to coerce and influence the actions and thoughts of the powerless	Changes in power relations within households and communities and at the macro level, e.g. increased role in decision making and bargaining power	Respect equal rights of others, challenge to inequality and unfair privileges
Power To: the capacity to act, to organise and change existing hierarchies	Increased skills, access and control over income and resources, and access to markets and networks	Increased skills and resources to challenge injustice and inequality faced by *others*
Power With: increased power from collective action, social mobilisation and alliance building	Organisation of the less powerful to enhance abilities to change power relations Increased participation of the less powerful	Supportive organisation of those with power to challenge injustice, inequality, discrimination and stigma
Power from Within: increased individual consciousness, self-dignity and awareness	Increased confidence and awareness of choices and rights; widened aspirations and ability to transform aspiration into action	Changes in attitudes and stereotypes; commitment to change

Source: Adapted from Mayoux (2003).

The debate is reflected in the choice of interventions and activities chosen to bring about empowerment. For example, it is common for empowerment projects to have economic objectives such as attracting capital and integrating small producers into the global markets. However, these projects often ignore structural issues, and this can lead to an assumption that access to resources leads automatically to increased choice and therefore to empowerment. Behind the delivery of microcredit programmes, as an example of one empowerment activity, is the assumption that improving women's access to income-earning opportunities will increase their decision-making powers in both the household and the public sphere, through their greater economic autonomy. However, it is not the

delivery of microcredit in itself that may empower but the *context* in which it is delivered that might enable women to get control over resources and increased bargaining power (Oxaal and Baden, 1997). Work by Goetz and Sen Gupta (1996) in Bangladesh shows that a large percentage of women's loans were controlled by male relatives; women had to mobilise funds elsewhere to repay them.

Equally, supporting capacity building of local organisations is a common approach to promote empowerment but it may not automatically serve the interests of the poor. A number of commentators (Alsop and Norton, 2004; Mosse, 2005) question the focus on the development of village-level associations, suggesting that such associations can become dominated by more affluent and more powerful members of society, thus perpetuating existing power structures and limiting the capabilities of the poor.

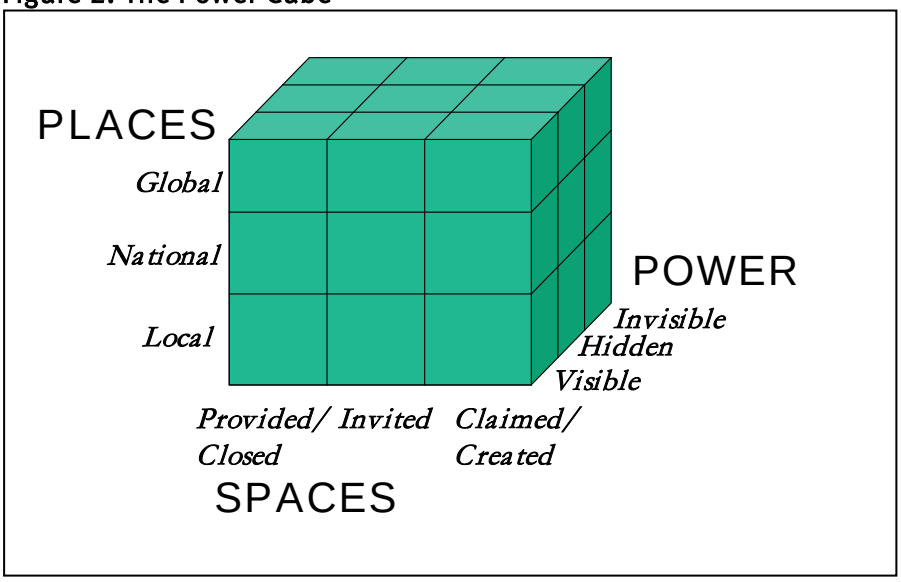
On the other hand, focusing only on transforming underlying power structures, such as the promotion of democracy or equity in political participation, is meaningless unless people are in the condition (in terms of health or economics) to take advantage of the opportunities (Larrea, 2005). In some cases, it has been shown that democratisation and participation projects bring empowerment predominantly to the middle classes.

Fulfilling immediate needs may be a necessary first step to enable other forms of empowerment. This suggests 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.

6. Three 'continuums' of power: The Power Cube

Gaventa's (2003) Power Cube (see Figure 2) presents a dynamic understanding of how power operates, how different interests can be marginalised from decision making and the strategies needed to increase inclusion. It describes how power is used by the powerful across three continuums, those of: **spaces**: how arenas of power are created; **places**: the levels and places of engagement; and **power**: the degree of visibility of power.

Figure 2: The Power Cube



Source: Gaventa (2003).

The use of a cube helps to emphasise that different types of power are a continuum, rather than presenting power in the oppositional way that it is often conceptualised (the powerful versus the powerless; the included versus the excluded, hegemony versus resistance). (Empowerment Note 3 provides more details and examples of the use of the Power Cube.) The Power Cube also stresses the importance of the ability to **exercise** power rather than merely its **possession**.

By the term **'space'**, Gaventa refers to the different arenas in which decision making takes place and in which power operates, and how these spaces are created. Understanding these can help identify entry points for change and encourage self-reflection on the power that different actors exercise. He distinguishes between three types:

1. 'Provided' or 'closed' spaces: spaces that are controlled by an elite group. These may exist within many government systems, the international finance institutions (IFIs) or institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). Many civil society efforts focus on opening up such spaces, through greater public involvement, transparency or accountability (Gaventa, 2005).
2. 'Invited' spaces: with external pressure, or in an attempt to increase legitimacy, some policymakers may create 'invited' spaces for outsiders to share their opinions. This may offer some possibility for influence but it is unlikely that these spaces will create real opportunities for long-term change. In extreme cases, it may act to legitimate the *status quo* or perpetuate the subordination of those who are delegated with 'power'.
3. 'Claimed' spaces: these can provide the less powerful with a chance to develop their agendas and create solidarity without control from power holders. An example of this is the participatory budget process in Porto Alegre.

Depicting these different arenas as falling along a 'continuum' suggests that moving up from 'closed' to 'open' spaces creates new spaces but does not necessarily close old ones (as zero-sum theory might suggest). Power gained in one space, through increased capacity and experience, can be used to enter other spaces.

Decision making takes place in a variety of arenas or 'spaces'. Distinguishing between different spaces helps identify entry points for change

The Power Cube also emphasises the importance of understanding interaction between levels of power and the 'places of engagement' and particularly distinguishes between the international, national and local levels or 'places'. In so doing, the Power Cube helps us to understand how global forces can be both enhancing and marginalising of livelihoods, depending on the circumstances. This is important, as some approaches to empowerment lay a heavy emphasis on the local.[5] The Power Cube helps us to understand how, in addition to this, global forces can both enhance and marginalise livelihoods depending on the circumstances. Parpart et al. (2002) discuss the way in which globalisation can lead to increased opportunities for some marginalised groups, such as increased opportunities to engage in markets. However, the authors also highlight the way in which shifts in trade have led not only to opportunity but also to the feminisation of some labour sectors, which can result in additional work burdens for women.

On a global scale, women own little property and are rarely in control of financial and export flows of global enterprises (Marchand and Runyan, 2000). They therefore tend to be involved in globalisation through access to labour markets (as is the case for Filipina domestic workers) rather than through financial or production markets. A big question remains as to how those who are currently marginalised can be empowered to take advantage of markets they cannot access. Gaventa (2003) is also keen to avoid the 'false dichotomy between evil global power holders and virtuous social movements' as both can suffer from unequal power relations. By emphasising the various levels, the Power Cube helps us to understand the way in which the local is intimately embedded in national and global 'places'.

Understanding the distinctions between visible and less visible forms of power enables one to explore the way in which laws and institutions may be perpetuating repressive social norms and values

The Power Cube also distinguishes the degree of visibility of power:

1. Visible power: this is the conventional understanding of power that is negotiated through formal rules and structures, institutions and procedures (see Box 3 on positive discrimination). Strategies for empowerment focus on policies, the legislature and the courts, and tools such as lobbying, media and litigation.
2. Hidden power: this focuses on the actual controls over decision making, and the way certain powerful people and institutions maintain their influence over the process and often exclude and devalue concerns and agendas of less powerful groups. Strategies for empowerment might include leadership development, movement building and the development of organisational strength and voice.
3. Invisible (internalised) power: this operates by influencing how individuals think of their place in society and explains why some are prevented from questioning existing power relations. Strategies for empowerment focus on strengthening confidence and increasing a sense of rights.

[5] Parpart et al. (2002), for example, claim that an overemphasis on the local 'encourages a rather romantic equation between empowerment, inclusion and voice that papers over the complexities'.

Box 3: Tackling discrimination – the pros and cons of using 'visible spaces'

The concept of discrimination is an example of where entrenched differences in power affect the access that certain groups may have to economic or political resources. In many contexts, discrimination is historically perpetuated and based on ethnic, cultural, economic or political features of the group. Using 'visible spaces' to put forward positive anti-discrimination policies might be temporarily empowering but this often does not tackle the structural roots of the problem. In some cases, it can even help reproduce differences between groups. For example, where development programmes are targeted at indigenous populations, this can result in 'being indigenous' being associated with 'being poor' (Diaz-Couder, 1998). Positive discrimination policies can also increase resistance from groups that are not targeted. For example, in reaction to the establishment of quotas for scheduled castes in India, other low castes protested violently (Braunholtz-Speight, 2006). In other cases, anti-discrimination policies have had positive results, but it can be argued that such policies are only an instrumental tool for empowerment, not a transformative one.

An important feature of oppression is the way in which it can be internalised: power can operate through consent as well as coercion

The main effect of oppression and disempowerment is that they prevent people from even considering that there can be an alternative to the situation they are in. Power can operate through consent as well as coercion. For example, many women who are abused for holding certain opinions will soon start to suppress them. A practical implication of this is that, as women internalise cultural subordination, their own perceptions cannot be trusted, and change can only occur with some external influence.

The role of outsiders in empowerment: the need to challenge internalise oppression while at the same time avoiding external 'manipulation' of the agenda and the process

Related to the distinctions in the different definitions of empowerment and forms of power, there is some debate over the extent to which outsiders can actually empower others, either at an individual or at a group level. Many of those perceiving empowerment as a capacity or agency-led process believe that it is problematic to attempt to empower from the outside. Therefore, devising any form of external programme is problematic, owing to the danger of manipulation.

The power relations behind disempowerment make it unrealistic for the disempowered to tackle inequality and disempowerment alone

On the other hand, by its very nature, disempowerment creates disadvantages through the way power relations shape choices, opportunities and wellbeing. Owing to the internalisation of oppression, the process of demanding increased rights or change cannot be expected to emerge spontaneously from within and to easily challenge entrenched inequalities, discrimination and structural causes of disempowerment.

Those who advocate external intervention suggest that it is the role of external institutions to facilitate these necessary internal strategic and practical change processes. This puts the development agency or facilitator in a difficult position: on the one hand, it must challenge the disempowered to change their values and behaviour; on the other hand, it should not be perceived as imposing its own values and the potential for disempowerment that this brings. This links into the discussion of cultural imperialism and the right of outsiders to push for change of an existing cultural form,[6] a debate that is particularly pertinent for the issue of female circumcision.

[6] This is a common dilemma in the human rights field: do rights-based approaches 'impose' western values?

7. Empowerment and implications for partnership

So, what are the practical implications for the way we work of the wealth of ideas and definitions surrounding the term 'empowerment'? The wide scope of activities and outcomes encompassed by the concept means that the sharing of common principles (not prescriptions) and generalised outcomes is an important prerequisite for healthy partnerships. For organisations striving to promote empowering relationships, the lack of a definition or clear principles can be considered disempowering, as it does not allow important accountability dynamics among the donor, their partners and target groups. There is much concern in the literature, particularly that from the South, about the 'misuse' of the concept of empowerment; much of this can be blamed on the 'fuzziness' of the term. However, this does raise the question of how the clarification of these common principles should take place with partners. This question is also pertinent for relationships with government partners and partnerships with other donors.

On the other hand, some organisations stress that an ambiguous definition is an active strategy related to the desire not to impose centralised thinking onto operational partners and country offices.[7/8]

There are a number of key issues concerning the criteria and profiles of partnerships for any agency endeavouring to promote empowerment. These issues include the behavioural and operational competencies of the partner, and how shared values on empowerment can be developed. A shared approach towards poverty and power is vital, but an important concern is how the donor can avoid manipulation of the approach.

An increased emphasis on advocacy may require different competencies from partners

If the approach to empowerment that is taken requires particular attention to be paid to power structures and relationships within a system, an increased emphasis on aspects of advocacy may be needed. Such aspects require capacity for dealing with conflict, facilitation, mediation, leadership and analysis. A shift from a focus on partnerships with grassroots service delivery to advocacy can have implications for the credibility and impact of an organisation. As a result, there is a tendency by most organisations to stress the importance of maintaining some direct service delivery.

The context influences the feasibility of certain empowerment activities and partnerships

Lessons from the introduction of a rights-based approach in the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) suggest the importance of programme strategies that suit specific contexts (Theis, 2004). This owes partly to regional variations in civil society and the availability of types of partners. In Latin America, with stronger government institutions and better developed civil society, UNICEF focuses at the national level on working with legislative, policy and institutional reform, and on analysis of public spending. In East and Southern Africa, it is felt to be more strategic to work at the community level, because there are fewer institutions and resources to implement political decisions and the delivery of services is weaker.

The way in which empowerment is approached needs to be adapted to the cultures and histories of the context. Analysis of a partner's own conceptualisation of empowerment can pre-empt possible cultural and value-based tensions. There is also a question about the degree to which the partners themselves should be involved in strategy development. A decentralised approach and definition can result in a

[7] CARE International accepts that there are many different concepts and definitions of empowerment and specifically does not provide an official definition.

[8] Fiedrich et al. (2003) suggest that '"empowerment" is better understood as a set of metaphors that have normative value and symbolic power for the would-be "empowerers"', rather than as a factual description or theoretical explanation of changes in the lives of the "empowered"'.

stronger sense of ownership and more creativity, but also in a lack of coherence across the organisation.

Contextual risk assessment is needed to ensure that partners are in a position to make an informed choice about the nature of the risks that they are likely to face

All organisations recognise the risks of a political empowerment approach exposing both partners and vulnerable members of the community. In extreme circumstances, there are examples of the killing or arrest of human rights defenders and those who challenge traditional power bases; addressing the political causes of poverty can lead to many forms of retaliation. Therefore, there is a need to operate differently according to the political context in which one is working.

8. Empowerment: A multidimensional approach to poverty reduction

Despite the multiple ideological roots to the concept, empowerment can be broadly defined as 'a progression that helps people gain control over their own lives and increases the capacity of people to act on issues that they themselves define as important'.

A failure to clearly define what is meant by 'empowerment' can weaken its value, either as an agent for change or as a tool for analysis. A lack of distinction between the types of power and clarity about the appropriate strategies to address such imbalances can mean that many empowerment-focused interventions fail to explicitly address power. Being aware of the different forms of power and their dynamic nature helps in understanding the multiple ways in which voices can be marginalised from (or included in) decision making. Understanding this helps to identify the kinds of strategies needed to shift unequal power dynamics.

SDC conceptualises empowerment as an emancipation process in which the disadvantaged are empowered to exercise their rights, obtain access to resources and participate actively in the process of shaping society and making decisions. The activities of SDC are therefore designed to strengthen the poor through bolstering self-confidence and ability to develop potential solutions of their own. However, SDC's commitment to empowerment also involves a political dimension, which aims to tackle those development models, interests and power relations that are the causes of injustice and poverty (SDC, 2004).

Taking a multidimensional approach requires defining empowerment in terms of both individual capacities and collective action to address inequalities that are the causes of poverty. A focus on empowerment emphasises that poverty not only is about low incomes, but also emanates from social exclusion and the lack of access to power, voice and security.

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Annex 1: Linkages between rights-based approaches and empowerment

Empowerment Note 1 for SDC, October 2007

Cecilia Luttrell and Sitna Quiroz

This note lays out the conceptual and practical linkages between human-rights based approaches (HRBAs) and empowerment, focusing on key aspects such as the different types of power and the roles of agency and structure. These aspects are discussed more fully in Luttrell and Quiroz (2007).

The UN Common Understanding of a HRBA is based on a number of principles, of which empowerment is an important one. A rights perspective provides a framework for examining and addressing the key aspects of power relations that influence people's capacities, rights and responsibilities. Just as empowerment of the rights holder is an integral part of a human-rights based approach, a HRBA adds value by helping to transform imbalances in existing distributions of power.

However, despite these similarities, there are elements of the rights and empowerment approaches that remain analytically distinct (Alsop and Norton, 2004). The most obvious of these is the emphasis on the obligations of the duty bearer. A HRBA has its foundation in the normative framework of international human rights standards and principles, and the protection and promotion of these. States, as primary duty bearers, are obliged to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights entitlements of individuals, or rights holders. This universally accepted set of standards presents operational distinctions from empowerment.

Both empowerment and rights approaches clearly lay an emphasis on people as agents of change rather than as beneficiaries (this is discussed more fully in Foresti and Ludi, 2007). A HRBA, however, focuses more strongly on relationships between public institutions (at various levels) and civil society, and how to make public institutions accountable to all citizens. This difference manifests itself most clearly in a key debate surrounding empowerment over the relative roles of structure versus agency. A HRBA has helped with a shift away from a needs approach based on 'charity', to a recognition of the rights of poor people to entitlements and the obligations on the part of others that are enshrined in law. In many development agencies, there has been a move away from a generic empowerment approach to a human rights approach as the social and political constraints on the poor are increasingly recognised.

Many writers, such as Alsop (2004) and Carney (2002), bring out the strong conceptual affinities between rights and empowerment approaches in their emphasis on power and respect for individuals. These writers stress that successful poverty reduction depends on providing opportunities for poor people to contest their rights through normative changes, including through legal frameworks. Civil and political rights empower poor people not only to claim their economic and social rights but also to demand accountability for good public services, pro-poor public policies and a transparent participatory process open to hearing their views. There is therefore a tendency for a HRBA to focus more overtly on the transforming 'structures' for empowerment. Indeed, there are those writing on empowerment from an agency perspective (such as Rowlands, 1997 and Kabeer, 2001) who do not consider the political or legal aspects of empowerment, nor place much, if any, emphasis on rights-based approaches.

Fox (2005) suggests that there is a difference between empowerment (as capacities) and rights (as institutionally recognised opportunities): rights may be recognised institutionally, but power imbalances often mean that actors are not able to actually claim them. A focus on the empowerment aspects of a HRBA, however, helps to emphasise the importance of the ability to *exercise* rights rather than merely their possession. Save the Children has faced concerns associated with the empowerment

of children in contexts where there is no acceptance of children expressing their views. Projects aimed at taking children out of employment to go to school were halted following consultations with children themselves. Instead, Save the Children decided to stop advocating for the full eradication of child labour, and has tried instead to find ways of combining education opportunities with children's responsibilities towards their families, including through appropriate labour practices that do not undermine their development.

This example also reflects the debate over different types of power. In this case, the process of demanding increased rights or change cannot be expected to emerge spontaneously to easily challenge entrenched inequalities. Save the Children's initial focus on 'power to' and the structural aspects of discrimination (which a HRBA encourages) was therefore less effective in this example. A subsequent focus on building 'power within' attempts to change individuals' own perceptions about their rights, capacities and potential in order to tackle 'invisible' (or internalised) power.

The way in which development agencies relate 'empowerment' to a HRBA varies. In SDC, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID), a human rights approach to empowerment is dominant. Indeed, SDC (2004) explicitly conceptualises empowerment as a process in which the disadvantaged are empowered to exercise their rights. NGOs such as Save the Children, CARE International and Concern also take a strong rights-based approach to policy and programming of empowerment. There are organisations that take a less 'political' approach and do not include a HRBA in their empowerment strategies. The World Bank has been active in the evolution of thinking around empowerment and has included principles such as empowerment and accountability within its new Social Development Strategy 2005 (Foresti et al., 2006). However, until recently, it has been constrained by its Articles of Agreement from working directly on human rights owing to the perception that these are 'political' issues. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) also does not mention rights in its discussions of empowerment, but its women's empowerment programmes are often implemented alongside women's rights programmes.

There are dilemmas associated with a HRBA. One of the main areas of potential conflict between a HRBA and empowerment is over the issue of collective rights and the way these might be in conflict with cultural values. In Latin America, the recognition of indigenous autonomies regulated by their own forms and notions of justice faces dilemmas in relation to the concept of the primacy of individual human rights over collective rights (Assies, 2002; Gouws, 2005).

In terms of practical implications, many NGOs have experienced significant changes in their relationships with partners accompanying the introduction of a HRBA. It can be a challenge to avoid disempowering partners while introducing a HRBA to previously service delivery-orientated organisations (see, for example, Luttrell and Piron, 2005). A HRBA also forces engagement in politics and power relations and can increase tensions when partners are not themselves committed to a HRBA. A HRBA helps move from 'passive beneficiaries' to 'active citizens' and therefore implies greater attention to advocacy and capacity building. A HRBA therefore requires a different skills base, with more emphasis on analytical than technical skills, skills that may not be present in the existing partner organisation.

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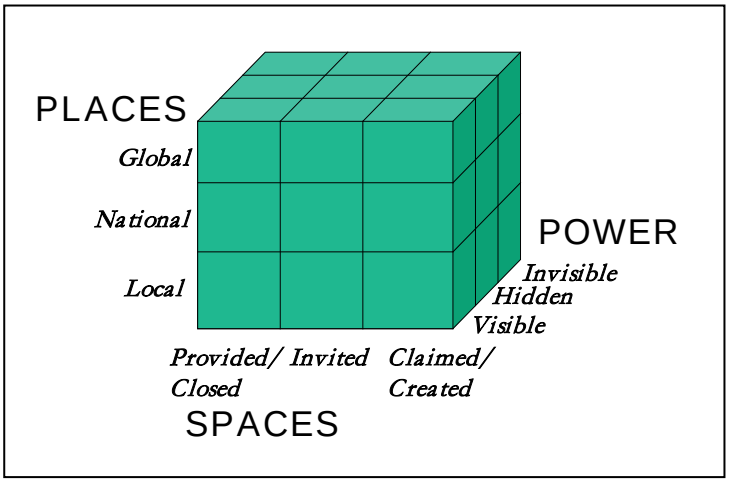
Annex 2: The Power Cube explained

Empowerment Note 3 for SDC, November 2007

Cecilia Luttrell, Kate Bird, Sarah Byrne, Jane Carter and Devanshu Chakravarti

This note discusses the use of the Power Cube as a means of expanding further on the ideas of power raised in the paper on 'Understanding and Operationalising Empowerment' (Luttrell and Quiroz, 2007). Gaventa's (2003; 2005) Power Cube presents a dynamic understanding of how power operates, how different interests can be marginalised from decision making, and the strategies needed to increase inclusion. It describes how power is used by the powerful across three continuums of: **spaces**: how arenas of power are created; **power**: the degree of visibility of power; and **places**: the levels and places of engagement.

The Power Cube



Source: Gaventa (2003).

By the term '**space**', Gaventa refers to the different arenas in which decision making takes place, in which power operates and how these spaces are created (see first table below). He distinguishes between three types:

1. 'Provided' or 'closed' spaces: spaces which are controlled by an elite group.
2. 'Invited' spaces: with external pressure, or in an attempt to increase legitimacy, some policymakers may create 'invited' spaces for outsiders to share their opinions.
3. 'Claimed' spaces: these can provide the less powerful with a chance to develop their agendas and create solidarity without control from power holders.

'Spaces' are fora for discussion or areas where interactions take place. They can be virtual (e.g. a web-based discussion) or an actual physical place (e.g. a parliamentary consultation meeting). The Power Cube helps us to understand these different forms of space and therefore how to use provided spaces better, how to create more invited space and how to facilitate the claiming of space through negotiation.

The Power Cube also distinguishes the degree of visibility of **power** (see second table):

1. Visible power: this is the conventional understanding of power that is negotiated through formal rules and structures, institutions and procedures.
2. Hidden power: this focuses on the actual controls over decision making, and the way certain powerful people and institutions maintain their influence over the process and often exclude and devalue concerns and agendas of less powerful groups.

3. Invisible (internalised) power: this operates by influencing how individuals think of their place in society and explains why some are prevented from questioning existing power relations.

The Power Cube helps make the distinction between different dimensions of power and therefore move beyond certain assumptions, such as 'the enforcers of rules are oppressors'. This may enable us to explore the way in which laws and institutions may be perpetuating repressive social norms and values.

The Power Cube emphasises the importance of understanding interaction between levels of power and the 'places of engagement' (see third table) and particularly distinguishes between the international, national and local levels or 'places'. In so doing, the Power Cube helps us to understand how global forces can be both enhancing and marginalising of livelihoods, depending on the circumstances. By emphasising the various levels, the Power Cube helps us to understand the way in which the local is intimately embedded in national and global 'places'.

The Power Cube explained: spaces where power is expressed

Type of space	What does this mean?	Example 1: Commercial sex workers (Jana et al., 2006)	Example 2: Experience of the Indo-Swiss Participative Watershed Development Project (see ISPWDK, 2005)
Provided/ closed spaces	Official or unofficial arenas controlled by an elite group (bureaucrats, experts or elected representatives) to which certain people or interest groups are invited, and from which others are excluded. This group identifies which issues they wish to discuss and controls the decision-making process without broader consultation or involvement.	• The design of policies relevant to the sex trade that involve only selected stakeholders such as employers, religious leaders, NGOs and officials and exclude sex workers from the process. • If a sex worker has a grievance s/he will seldom approach official authorities but restricts the articulation of grievances to those voiced at 'provided' spaces permitted by their employers.	• Gram Panchayat (GP), a unit of local government in rural India, is an elected body but is perceived as a 'closed' or 'provided' space by the community. One reason for this is that the fund allocation by the GP is guided more by demographic considerations and the influence of powerful leaders in the GP rather than by needs-based considerations – a village with a higher number of voters gets proportionately higher funds allocation. • In ISPWDK, a team comprising members from different stakeholders – SDC, Intercooperation (IC), local NGO partners and select community members – carried out the initial project design. Other community members and NGO staff were informed later.
Invited spaces	This arena is also controlled by an elite group but efforts are made to invite others to join them to discuss issues of mutual interest. However, they frame the nature of the engagement. They chose **if** to call a meeting, **whom** to invite to the meeting and the **agenda** for the meeting. They also ensure that the meeting is reported in a way that reflects their interests (e.g. minutes, press release etc.)	• If a health organisation wishes to work with sex workers and invites them to share opinions, this engagement takes places within an 'invited' space. • Sex workers are given the opportunity to visit a local hospital, where they can meet specialised health staff. Discussions focus on prevention and use of reproductive health services.	• The programme steering committee, the highest decision-making body in ISPWDK, comprised members from all stakeholders – SDC, IC, NGO partners and community members. The programme coordinator convened the meetings every six months and took the lead in preparation of agenda and in organising the minutes. • In the village development societies (VDSs), there was insistence on due representation of all sexes and sections of community. In the beginning, the VDS was clearly an 'invited space' for women and *dalits*. The elites were initially hesitant to accept these groups as equals.

Claimed/ created spaces	A group, normally excluded by elites, opens up a new space for exercising power (e.g. by lobbying to influence national policy) and pursuing their own agenda of concern. These spaces often emerge out of sets of common concerns.	• A network of sex workers intervenes on behalf of a worker to claim their right to unionise, seeking to improve their legal rights.	• In the VDS, the women slowly started commanding respect for their punctuality, discipline and sincerity. Later, all VDS formalised 50% women's representation (although the VDS bylaw stipulated 33%). • Women, unaccustomed to public life, initially organised themselves into self-help groups (SHGs), primarily for savings and credit activities. Later, they led successful movements against illicit arrack production. SHGs led to women claiming a greater say in the 'invited spaces' such as VDSs and in 'provided spaces' such as the GP.

Table 2: The Power Cube explained: dimensions of power

Type of power	What does this mean?	Example 1: Commercial sex workers	Example 2: Experience of the ISPWDK
Invisible power	We internalise the norms and values of our society. This may lead to individuals unconsciously controlling their own behaviour to meet social expectations. This might involve not being able to act or not feeling that it is legitimate for them to act.	The social norms and values that are attached to sex, sexuality and the sex trade may result in sex workers feeling shame, preventing them from being able to raise their voices against exploitative practices.	In rural India, caste and gender play an important role in shaping people's understandings of their needs, roles and possibilities for action. A sense of powerlessness is internalised through socialisation. For example, during the project self-reflection exercises, while recounting experiences of the pre-project scenario, the women in one watershed said: 'Women were scared of everything, even to say that we were sick. Even when we were sick, we never went to hospital, but suffered if men did not take us. We did not send our daughters to school. If a girl spoke to any man, we would suspect that her character was not good.'
Hidden power	Powerful people may exert their power even when they are not physically present. This may influence the behaviour of others. This acts as a means of excluding the others or maintaining privileged entry by certain people to decision making and public spaces.	The manager of a brothel may not be present but may have an important role in decision making. Therefore, her/his power is present even when s/he is absent. The sex workers may not be legal immigrants and may therefore simultaneously be dependent on the brothel owner for protection as well as vulnerable to his/her ability to denounce them.	Powerful people, both within and outside the project area, have an important influence. For example, many poor people depend on seasonal migration. Each season they tend to work in the same place and develop patron–client relationships with the same employer. Poor people may not risk losing this long-term relationship by participating in short-term project activities that are available in their village and may be better paid.
Visible power	Formal laws, rules, structures, institutions and procedures of decision making and the people who ensure that the rules are kept (e.g. police, bureaucrats).	These **definable** aspects of power include the legislation which controls the sex trade, the police and administration who control 'entry' into the trade and the power of local 'pimps' who dictate the terms of the trade.	In rural India, visible power remains mostly with government officials/elected representatives at different levels – the GP secretary, the junior engineer, the GP president or the policeman.

Table 3: The Power Cube explained: places where power is expressed

Type of place	Example	Examples related to the ISPWDK
Global	Global fora might include the UN, the WTO, the worldwide web, satellite TV channels with global reach (e.g. CNN, BBC World, Sky), the Roman Catholic Church and international criminal courts. In some respects, power is shifting to more globalised 'places' and local actors (such as the Narmada Dam and Chiapas campaigns) and may use global forums as arenas for action more effectively than they can appeal to institutions of local 'places'.	Bilateral and multilateral agencies working on natural resource management and water like SDC, DFID, World Bank, European Commission (EC) and UN Development Program (UNDP). Foundations promoted or endowed by rich businessmen for social purposes like the Ford Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Sir Ratan Tata Trust and Sir Dorabji Tata Trust. Global Fora like the World Water Forum. The ideas and influence of international consultants.
National	National fora might include parliament, national media, networked organisations (e.g. local branches of civil society organisations, churches, national trade unions, chambers of commerce) and national criminal courts. The interrelation between local and national 'places' is seen clearly in the debates over decentralisation and the extent to which power is officially shared with the locality.	The Planning Commission in India and the different ministries from which funding for watershed programmes is sourced, such as the Department of Land Resources under the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Agriculture. Committees set up for the review of the guidelines for watersheds funded by different government programmes, like the recent Parthasarthy Committee. At the state level, government agencies funding watershed programmes including the Drought Prone Area Programme, the Integrated Watershed Development Programme, the Agriculture Department and the State Watershed Department.
Local	Local fora might include local government, local civil society organisations, community-based organisations, clubs, local media, local courts. In addition private arenas such as the household, which play an important role but outside of the 'public sphere'.	The GP and village-level agencies such as the VDSs and the local governance units at district and sub-district levels (the Zila and Taluka Panchayat).

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Annex 3: The definition and operationalisation of empowerment in different development agencies

Empowerment Note 4 for SDC, August 2007

Claire Scrutton and Cecilia Luttrell

Introduction

This note provides details on the differing approaches to empowerment in a variety of donor agencies and NGOs, according to a selection made from official documentation associated with these agencies. The debates and concepts surrounding empowerment are discussed more fully in the paper on 'Understanding and Operationalising Empowerment' (Luttrell and Quiroz, 2007). 'Empowerment' is a term that has been embraced by a diverse range of institutions, from the World Bank to Oxfam to many more radical NGOs, but few of these share common definitions. Some organisations leave the term undefined (for example, UNDP, Oxfam and Save the Children). In others, different departments have their own interpretations, and there is no clear centralised definition.

The table below presents information from various policy documents from a wide spectrum of organisations, to present their attitudes to a number of different issues. These include:

Process versus outcome: Many organisations, such as SDC, CIDA, DFID and Oxfam, view empowerment as both an outcome and a process. Others (such as the US Agency for International Development – USAID – and UNDP) take an instrumentalist view of empowerment and focus more narrowly on the importance of process and the assumption that participation alone will lead to empowerment. CARE International not only focuses on the importance of participating in the decision-making process, but also prioritises those processes that lead people to perceive themselves as both able and entitled to make decisions. This leads to an emphasis on the gaining of power and control over decisions and resources that determine the quality of one's life. This focus has also been adopted by many of the agencies to encourage an emphasis on participation in decision making (Save the Children, the International Fund for Agricultural Development – IFAD – and the World Bank), ability to organise (Oxfam) and political participation (UNDP).

The **scope of empowerment** also varies. Empowerment is often associated with gender perspectives, and many organisations (such as the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency – Sida, CIDA and USAID) use the term 'empowerment' only within the remit of gender issues. For example, according to CIDA's (1999) gender policy, empowerment is central to achieving gender equality and helping women to become aware of unequal power relations, to gain control over their lives and to acquire a greater voice to overcome inequality in their home, workplace and community. Others, such as DFID and SDC, are clear that empowerment is not only a gender issue but that it concerns a whole host of marginalised groups.

Agency versus structure: Many agencies, such as SDC, CIDA and CARE International, have adopted a focus on agency, whereas DFID (in particular) emphasises the importance of 'reforming political institutions' and structures.

The role of outsiders in empowerment: Oxfam GB (2005) and Concern promote self-help approaches to empowerment, with the belief that doing things for people where they could do them themselves could be harmful. Others (UNDP and USAID) have a different attitude; only outsiders can bring about empowerment. Changes must be made at government level and via civil society organisations; it is the role of external institutions to facilitate internal change processes.

Agency (and sources)	Definition/concept of empowerment	Empowerment programmes
SDC SDC, 1999 SDC, 2002 SDC, 2004 SDC, 2005a SDC, 2005b SDC, 2006	Empowerment represents both a goal and a method for SDC. It is stated to be a process of emancipation in which the disadvantaged are empowered to exercise their rights, to obtain access to resources and to participate actively in the process of shaping society and making decisions. The activities of SDC are designed to strengthen the poor in bolstering their self-esteem, identity, self-confidence and ability to analyse problems and develop potential solutions of their own (SDC, 2004). Older SDC documents have slightly different descriptions, but this illustrates the way that SDC regularly questions its definitions and updates them accordingly. SDC acknowledges that its recipients use their own definitions of empowerment.	Gender, health, education, governance, human rights, information and communication technology (ICT) and sport for development
DFID DFID, 1997 DFID, 2000a DFID, 2000b DFID, 2001 DFID, 2005	**Similarities with SDC** • States that empowerment is an aim of DFID programmes • Discusses different levels of empowerment (individual and collective) but not national or global • States that empowerment is both a process and an objective • Does not define power • Underlines psychological, social, economic and political empowerment types as important aspects of empowerment; there is no specific focus on legal, youth or women's empowerment • Focuses on individual and collective decision making **Differences to SDC** • Discusses economic empowerment in terms of incomes and assets • Not clear if reference to 'collective' empowerment incorporates the national and global scale • Focuses on increasing power	Gender, education, political empowerment, through rights-based programmes
GTZ (German Development Cooperation) GTZ, 2006	**Similarities with SDC** • States that empowerment is an aim of GTZ activities • Specifies 'disadvantaged sections of the population'; does not discuss youth empowerment • Incorporates economic, social, political and psychological empowerment • Views rights as important to women's empowerment • Focuses on access to resources, ability to take control of life and decision making **Differences to SDC** • Includes legal empowerment • Discusses power relations as being a core issue of empowerment • Sees empowerment as an ongoing process. • Believes that individual empowerment is required to enable collective empowerment • Only mentions individual and collective empowerment, not local, national or global	Women's empowerment through gender, HIV/AIDS and human rights programmes, youth empowerment through education, HIV/AIDS and drugs programmes
Danida (Danish International Development Agency) Danida, 2000a Danida, 2000b Danida, 2000c Danida, 2000d Danida, 2003 Danida, 2005	**Similarities with SDC** • Shows a shift in the way it defines and approaches empowerment over the past few years **Differences to SDC** • In 2000, Danida produced an extensive document on its approach to empowerment. At this stage, the term 'empowerment' was primarily associated with individuals, mostly women. The document states that it was not Danida's practice to specifically use the term 'empowerment' in its policies, strategies and operational guidelines. However, the paper reviewed other approaches to empowerment, examples of how they were being implemented through donor recipients, and the way forward. The document implies that empowerment would become an important aspect of Danida's work • Policy and strategy since 2000 appear to have shied away from using the term 'empowerment'	Gender and economic empowerment

	• Empowerment is rarely mentioned in more recent literature and there is no definition	
Norad Norad, 2000 Norad, 2006	**Similarities with SDC** • Includes individual, collective and social empowerment • Includes control and ability to participate in public decision making • Does not define power **Differences to SDC** • Empowerment is not central to Norad policy and programmes, it is often an unintended outcome • Only refers to empowerment within gender and human rights policies • Reference to empowerment always relates to power and control • Focuses only on the individual and collective level • Does not spell out how empowerment may occur	Gender, health, education, informal sector, agriculture, democracy and human rights
Sida Sida 2002 Sida 2005	**Differences to SDC** • Focuses on gender and empowerment • Mentioned briefly in Sida's policy on peace and security • Political and economic empowerment is referred to in Sida's gender equality policy but these are not defined • Sida has produced some key research papers but these are not reflected in their policy and programmes	Women's empowerment through ICT, education, health, HIV/AIDS, land management and conservation
USAID USAID, 2003 USAID, 2005 USAID, 2006	**Similarities with SDC** • Recognises importance of rights but the focus is on property rights **Differences to SDC** • No clear definition of empowerment • States that people are empowered through participation alone • Focuses on gender, political and economic empowerment • Does not mention empowerment in new major policy papers, only in country programme web pages	Women's empowerment through health, HIV/AIDS, natural resource management, good governance, education, business training and microcredit; youth economic empowerment through training, apprenticeships and entrepreneurship
CIDA CIDA, 1996 CIDA, 1999 CIDA, 2004 CIDA, 2005	Mentions empowerment in current policy documents only in relation to gender and youth in war-affected areas. Human rights paper does not mention empowerment. However, the 1999 gender equality policy provides a good definition. **Similarities with SDC** • Empowerment is both a process and an outcome • Psychological, social, political empowerment are referred to • Focuses on how to support people to empower themselves • Focuses on decision making and taking control • Focuses on confidence and self-reliance • Refers to both collective and individual empowerment • Does not define power **Differences to SDC** • Occurs only in gender equality policy and programmes (men and women); poverty reduction policy includes empowerment of women, children, minorities, the landless, the unemployed and the displaced • Economic empowerment is not included but an economic empowerment approach is used in programmes. • Emphasises giving people a voice • Does not mention national or global level empowerment • Makes mention of rights but women's empowerment programmes are often implemented alongside women's rights programmes • Does not refer to access to resources	Women's rights and empowerment, education, health, good governance, private sector development, HIV/AIDS, women's enterprise projects, microcredit, youth in war-affected areas

JICA (Japan Intl. Coop Agency)	**Differences to SDC** No clear definition	
World Bank Narayan, 2002	**Similarities with SDC** • Does not define power **Differences to SDC** • The Empowerment and Poverty Reduction Sourcebook (Narayan, 2002) outlines a detailed approach to empowerment • This incorporates the individual, collective, local, national and global levels • It incorporates economic, social, political and women's empowerment, but focuses on institutions, governance, the state and markets • The short definition focuses on people taking control and participating in the decision-making process in relation to institutions that affect their lives • It fails to recognise different levels and types of empowerment • It has clearly defined and conceptualised empowerment • States that there is no single institutional model for empowerment • Provides an empowerment framework	ICT, economic empowerment, decentralisation, community empowerment, education, governance
UNDP UNDP, 1995 UNDP, 2000 UNDP, 2004 UNDP, 2005	**Similarities with SDC** • Rights can empower people, but this must be done by outsiders • Focuses on political, social, economic empowerment but from a macroeconomic perspective **Differences to SDC** • Does not provide a concise definition • Focuses on gender, MDGs and the gender empowerment measurement, economic participation and decision making, political participation and decision making, and power over economic resources • States that participation brings empowerment • Changes must be made at government level and through civil society organisations to bring about empowerment • Outsiders must facilitate the process of empowerment • Does not acknowledge the individual, psychological and radical nature of empowerment	Gender, education, economic activity, health, HIV/AIDS, microcredit, private sector development, ICT, political empowerment through parliamentary development, electoral assistance and human rights
UNHCHR (UN High Commission for Human Rights) UNHCHR, 2002	**Similarities with SDC** • Acknowledges the importance of rights • Focuses on men and women taking control of their lives **Differences to SDC** • Has a strong rights-based approach • Follows World Bank definitions • Emphasises accountability • Takes a national/global perspective • Does not focus on social and economic aspects, only on people's rights in the eyes of the law	
IMF (International Monetary Fund) IMF, 2005	**Differences to SDC** • Empowerment through attention to macroeconomic frameworks • Defines empowerment as political power, confidence and dignity • Scant discussion of what empowerment means • States that it uses a rights-based approach • Focuses on government policies • Specifies empowerment for women, children, youth, elderly and disabled	Private sector development and education
ActionAid UK and ActionAid International ActionAid, 2004; ActionAid, 2006	• Does not define empowerment in policies • Overall strategy mentions empowerment of women and girls but this is not defined • Focuses on social, economic, political and rights-based empowerment of women and girls and their participation in decision making	Women and girl's empowerment through education, literacy, ICT, HIV/AIDS, rights-based and land tenure programmes;

		women's economic empowerment through microcredit
CARE International CARE International, 2002 CARE International, 2005	**Similarities with SDC** • Rights-based approach is important • Empowerment is core to programmes • Emphasises people taking control of their lives • Recognition of empowerment at individual and collective levels • Accepts there are many different concepts and definitions of empowerment • Focuses on confidence and self-identity • Focuses on participating in the decision-making process **Differences to SDC** • Emphasises that empowered people can hold others accountable • Defines power and views these definitions as central • No emphasis on types of empowerment • No emphasis on national or global empowerment • No central definition – different departments have different or no definition • Empowerment is a process	Rights-based programmes, gender focused programmes, health, education
Concern Worldwide Concern Worldwide, 2001 Concern Worldwide, 2003	**Similarities with SDC** • Rights-based approach is important • Individual, collective, men and women • Focus on people making changes for themselves, not facilitated by outsiders • Includes knowledge **Differences to SDC** • Does not provide an overall definition • Empowerment and women's empowerment is central to all the work • Regularly uses the term 'genuine empowerment' • Does not recognise different types of empowerment (social, political, economic etc.) in its definition • Does not include national or global aspects	Health, HIV/AIDS, education, capacity building, livelihoods and microfinance; gender and youth are integral to programmes
Oxfam International and Oxfam GB Oxfam GB, 2003 Oxfam GB, 2005	**Similarities with SDC** • Views empowerment as both a process and an outcome • Focuses on people's self-awareness, rights, ability to organise and control resources for themselves **Differences to SDC** • Not clearly defined in policy documents or on the website other than in Oxfam (2005) • Provides a definition and diagram of power • Provides a comprehensive but complex framework for empowerment, but does not provide a concise definition; the framework incorporates psychological, economic, cultural, political and social dimensions • Recognises that the meaning of empowerment varies depending on the people, level, place and time • Provides in-depth discussion on women's empowerment and elements for capacity building for empowerment	Women's empowerment, education, health and livelihoods
Save the Children Save the Children UK, 2003 Save the Children UK, 2005	**Similarities with SDC** • Deals with individual and collective empowerment • Focuses on participation in decision making for NGO programmes and public policy • Mentions self-confidence and dignity • Includes social, political, young people and women's empowerment **Differences to SDC** • Does not provide a concise definition of empowerment • Has a strong rights-based approach to policy and programming • Focuses on power relations and provides definitions	Young people's and children's empowerment and community (adults that affect the young people's lives) empowerment through education, health, HIV/AIDS, equality

	• Bases approach on women's and political empowerment frameworks and adapts these to work with young people • Mentions access to entitlements • Uses the term 'citizen empowerment' • Mentions the process from individual to collective empowerment	and rights, poverty and economics, exploitation and protection programmes

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Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE1 7JD
UK

Tel: +44 (0)20 7922 0300
Fax: +44 (0)20 7922 0399
Email: publications@odi.org.uk
Website: www.odi.org.uk

ISBN 978 1 907288 03 6
Working Paper (Print) ISSN 1759 2909
ODI Working Papers (Online) ISSN 1759 2917