

The World Vision Area Development Programme

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The Concepts of Power and Empowerment*Defining Empowerment*

Over the last decade the concept of empowerment has emerged as the main paradigm of development throughout the non-governmental sector. O’Gorman (1995) argues that empowerment signals a transition away from traditional development that confined people’s role to that of passive recipients, effectively rendering them dependent on handouts in the form of foreign aid. Instead, empowerment strategies aim to assign them an active role, to enable them to become activists for their own, self-defined cause.

Obviously, the concept of empowerment is closely linked to the notion of power. The Oxford English Dictionary (1998) explains empowerment as: “to give (someone) the authority or power to do something”. Power, in turn, is given for a purpose: to enable action (cf. Giddens, 1977:347-348). Consequently, we can define empowerment as: to enable people to act on their own in order to reach their self-defined goals. However, in order to analyse empowerment strategies it is necessary to first clarify the concept of power.

The Dimensions of Empowerment

Hardly any concept in social science is more contested than that of power. However, the literature on social power agrees on the fact that power is a multidimensional phenomenon (cf. Baldwin, 1989:2). One of the most prominent attempts to conceptualise power has been done by Lukes (1974). Based on an analysis of Dahl’s and Bachrach and Baratz’s work, Lukes distinguished three dimensions (or faces) of power.

- 1-D power: The ability to effectively mobilise material and non-material¹ resources in order to determine decision outcomes in one’s favour.
- 2-D power: The ability to confine the scope of decision-making processes in order to exclude issues from decision-making forums that are against one’s interests (nondecision-making), thereby effectively limiting the participation of others.
- 3-D Power: The attempt to shape people’s perceptions, cognitions and preferences in order to legitimise one’s own agenda.

I rephrased Lukes’ dimensions of power as dimensions of empowerment as follows:

1. To develop the ability to access and control material and non-material resources and to effectively mobilise them in order to influence decision outcomes.
2. To develop the ability to access and influence decision-making processes on various levels (household, community, national, global) in order to ensure the proper representation of one’s interests (also described as getting a “voice”). (This usually requires the formation of local organisations to facilitate collective action)
3. To gain an awareness of dominant ideologies and of the nature of domination that one is subjected to in order to discover one’s identity, and ultimately to develop the ability to independently determine one’s preferences and act upon them.

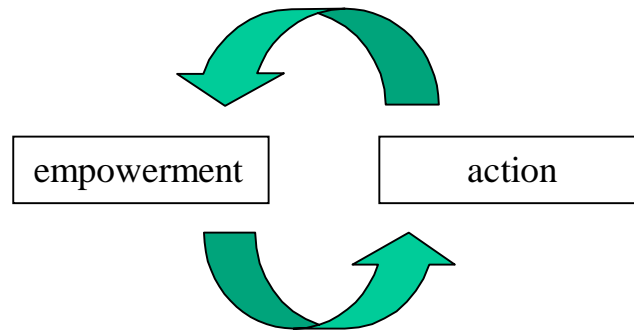
¹ Non-material resources are individual capacities and skills, knowledge, information etc. They are at least as significant as material resources. For example, the mere possession of agricultural equipment does not necessarily give a person power. In order to effectively use it, the person has to have the relevant skills and information.

After reviewing the development literature I decided to add a fourth dimension, which could be named personal or psychological empowerment (cf. Friedmann, 1992 ; Rowlands, 1997), also known in the psychology literature as the concept of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995): To develop the ability to trust in one's personal abilities in order to act with confidence. The following table provides an overview of all four dimensions.

Conceptualising Empowerment as a Process

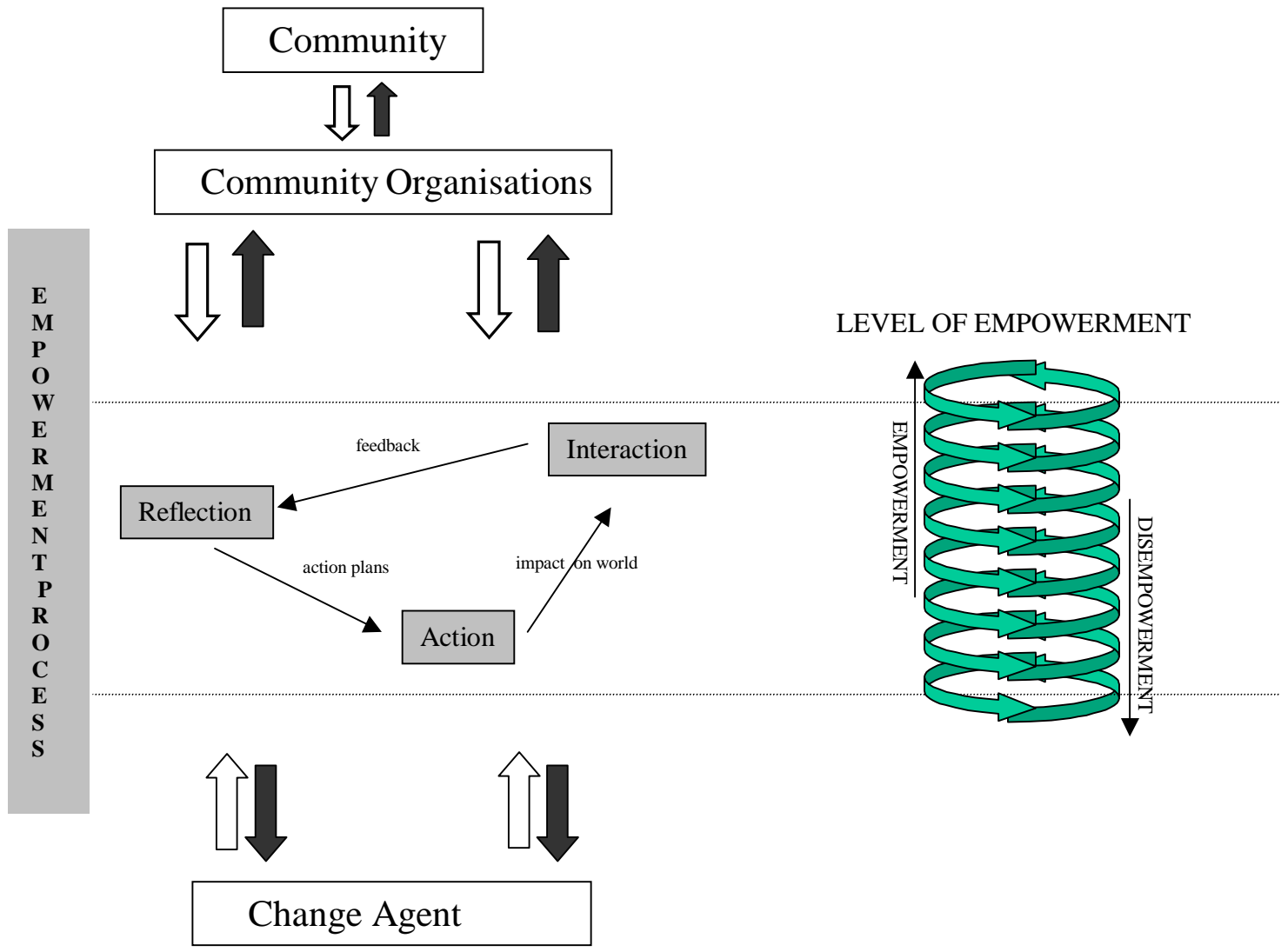
The Empowerment Process

The four-dimensional framework can be used to measure *how much* and *what kind* of power was acquired, but the nature of empowerment makes it necessary to evaluate *how* this power was acquired. The reason for this is the fact that empowerment is not a static phenomenon but a process. In other words, it is not just important to evaluate *what* was done (action outcomes) but *how* it was done and *who* did it (nature of the action). I argue that empowerment is in fact a cyclical process: the four dimensions of empowerment are prerequisites for action, and action in turn is central to the empowerment process, since the only way of becoming an agent is by acting. Action and empowerment are therefore linked in a cyclical relationship [diagram]



In fact, I would argue that the empowerment process consists of actions, or more precisely, of a dynamic process of action and reflection as outlined by Freire (1993) in his work “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”. People’s liberating (or empowering) action must be based on their own critical reflection on the nature of their situation; action without reflection is merely behaviour and sub-human. Additionally, people’s actions are shaped and in turn shape their behavioural world. The feedback resulting from their interaction with this world feeds back into their reflection process, thereby closing the circle of reflection-action-feedback.

We can now visualise the empowerment process as a spiral consisting of consecutive cycles of reflection and action. The nature of empowerment process determines its outcomes: it is empowering (upward spiral) when people reflect and act, and disempowering (downward spiral) when the change agent discourages people’s reflection and/or action by doing it himself, and/or when the feedback from the behavioural world hinders people’s efforts. A state of complete empowerment would mean that the people would have the power to do anything they wanted to without needing any outside help; complete disempowerment, on the other hand, would mean a complete dependence on outsiders. The following diagram visualises these relationships.



A Process-oriented Framework for Evaluating Empowerment

The empowerment process can be measured in two ways, by evaluating its nature and by measuring its outcomes.

In order to evaluate the nature I refer to Garba's (1999:134) distinction between endogenous and exogenous empowerment. The exogenous view stands for the belief that empowerment is something that outsiders can bestow upon or deliver to the people. Endogenous empowerment, on the other hand, refers to a view that it is only the people who can empower themselves and that outsiders should merely be facilitators that help people to act by creating enabling conditions for their actions. The nature of the process can therefore be evaluated by looking at the extent to which the outside change agent restricts its role to that of a facilitator or "enabler" rather than acting on people's behalf.

Other criteria are found in Freire's writings. He focuses not just on actions but on the interaction between both parties, which should be dialogical in order to be empowering. According to Freire, a dialogue requires the unity and presence of both reflection and action; it requires a partnership of equals between both parties; it requires that both listen and learn; and it requires a belief in the other's abilities as an intelligent human being.

The process outcomes can be evaluated by measuring the state of people's empowerment. For example, one is empowered in the third-dimensional sense by reflecting; the extent to which one reflects, which is the nature of the process, determines one's state of awareness, which is the process outcome in regards to 3-D empowerment at a certain point in time.

Methodology

The analysis was based on a review of World Vision documentation on the ADP model. It also included a case study of Oudong ADP in Cambodia, based on World Vision project documents and interviews with two World Vision Cambodia staff. It was not an in-depth impact assessment, which would require extensive fieldwork. Rather, the purpose of doing the case study was to support the evaluation of the ADP model by shedding some light on how the model was put into practice in a particular instance.

The ADP Model

The development of the Area Development Programme (ADP) model was caused by an increasing dissatisfaction with World Vision's traditional, more top-down oriented community development approach, which showed a tendency of making its beneficiaries dependent on the external aid.

ADPs are still integrated rural and community-based development projects. However, they represent a much more long-term involvement of 12-15 years and span across a much larger area (between 20 and 50 villages). The chief aim of the ADP is to empower the people so that they can eventually own (meaning self-manage) their development process. Alan Bell from World Vision New Zealand defines it as "a model that facilitates empowerment by providing a framework that starts a process of people's development". After the 12-15 years World Vision withdraws from the areas and the ADP becomes a legally registered, independent NGO fully run by the local community without any external assistance. In this sense, the ADP never stops operating; only the ownership changes, gradually shifting from World Vision to the locals as time progresses. This is achieved through a process of phased involvement:

1. Relationship-building phase: ADP is externally facilitated and supported

2. Implementation phase: ADP is locally managed and externally supported
3. Withdrawal/evaluation phase: ADP is locally managed and locally supported

Evaluating the ADP Model

The Nature of the ADP Empowerment Process

In the ADP model World Vision defines its role as that of a facilitator who initiates people's development process and then focuses on building their capacity, until the ADP can finally be handed over to them. In the initial phase, World Vision's role is much more pro-active; it seeks to start a reflection process and to stimulate local initiative. Progressively, responsibilities and decision-making power are devolved to local institutions. However, the bulk of the funding for project initiatives is still provided by the organization. Ultimately, World Vision only gets involved when the communities request advice or assistance.

During the whole process the aim of the organization is to avoid doing things for the people that they could do by themselves, and instead to focus on building their capacity to act independently from outside assistance. The findings of the case study show that World Vision Cambodia has to a large extent been able to put this concept into practice.

The evaluation of the ADP-initiated empowerment process also indicates that the ADP model seeks to establish an in the Freirian sense dialogical relationship with the communities: it encourages them to act upon their reflections; it attempts to build an equal partnership with them and espouses a strong belief in people's abilities; it allows plenty of time for relationship-building and discussions; and it seeks to establish mutual trust between both parties.

Therefore, the ADP as a theoretical model clearly envisions to pursue an endogenous empowerment strategy, a conclusion that is affirmed by the findings from the case study.

The Outcomes of the ADP Empowerment Process

Its endogenous nature is underlined by the positive outcomes of the ADP-initiated empowerment process.

Due to the fact that no primary research was conducted, only the outcomes in relation to the first two dimensions can be empirically verified. However, the dialogical nature of interactions between World Vision and the people indicates a high probability of third-dimensional empowerment. Also, using Bandura's (1995) framework for perceived self-efficacy points towards a significant likelihood of fourth-dimensional empowerment resulting from the ADP application.

The evaluation indicated that the ADP model is likely to lead to significant first-dimensional empowerment (people's ability to influence decision outcomes). The case study findings support this conclusion, particularly in regards to the high percentage of people freed from debt and the significantly improved food security. Moreover, the structural power of the community organisations in the area is very high; people's influence is now rivaling that of local elites and government authorities. However, their financial dependence on World Vision Cambodia is still significant, and it is possible but not yet fully clear that this can be changed by the time of the organisation's withdrawal².

There are strong signs that people's first-dimensional empowerment will translate into a much stronger ability to determine agendas and to voice their concerns,

² However, the project has only been half-way completed, and a final statement in this regard cannot be made.

particularly through to the local institutional structures that have been created. The process of gradual withdrawal that is part of the ADP model means that ultimately the communities are fully empowered in the second-dimensional sense. An example for this is the Vealpong commune in Oudong ADP that is at present locally managed without World Vision's active involvement (the organization only provides advice on request).

Conclusion

The evaluation of the nature as well as the outcomes of the empowerment process that the ADP model seeks to initiate points towards a potential for empowering its beneficiaries in regards to all four dimensions. However, the actual impact depends on a successful implementation of the model. Whereas the Oudong ADP case study demonstrates the possibility of doing so, World Vision's overall experience underlines my assumption that such an undertaking will in no way be easy:

- There is a risk of reversing to a delivery-style type of development, meaning that the empowerment process becomes consciously or unconsciously exogenous
- The ADP stands and falls with strong and independent local institutions and horizontal linkages between them; a failure to establish them early on increases the chances that true empowerment will never occur
- Even strong local organizations that are able to manage the ADP by themselves are not necessarily financially independent from the organization; the achievement of financial sustainability can be difficult to attain (however, that does not mean that it is impossible to obtain it)

I identified the following points as key factors for a successful ADP implementation:

- Staff who are genuinely committed to the people, have time to build relationships with them, and always try to avoid doing things for the people that they can do themselves
- A strong focus and commitment to the gradual nature of the process, never forgetting that after 12-15 years the ADP has to be fully run and funded by the communities
- An emphasis on building strong local organisations from an early stage on

Overall, empowerment strategies will never be easy to put into practice. I would argue that the World Vision ADP model shows that genuine empowerment is not an unattainable goal, and presents a valuable contribution towards reaching it.

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