Institute of Development Studies

Conceptualising empowerment and the implications for pro poor growth

A paper for the DAC Poverty Network

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SUMMARY

This paper proposes a framework for how empowerment can be conceptually understood and operationally explored. It makes recommendations for forthcoming areas of work within the POVNET Work Programme on empowering poor women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth. The full Terms of Reference are in Annex B. In responding to our terms of reference the authors have sought to introduce ideas and evidence from latest publications on this theme, combined with findings from our own research.

We understand empowerment happens when individuals and organised groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realise that vision by changing the relations of power that have been keeping them in poverty. The implications of this understanding can be explored through the different facets of 'social', 'economic' and 'political'. These are conceptual tools for identifying complex and mutually dependent processes that development actors can support and facilitate for achieving pro-poor growth.

We pay particular attention to 'economic empowerment' as an entry point because of the considerable research that POVNET can draw upon to synthesise and disseminate what has been learnt about how changes in one sphere of relations – for example in relation to financial institutions enabling people to procure loans - may not necessarily trigger changes in another sphere such as in local politics or within the household. Without such broader processes of change, changes in just this one sphere may be easily reversible. Donors can play a useful role in helping design such interventions so they may have a helpful multiplier effect in other social and political spheres leading to pro-poor growth.

Empowerment – 'power within' and 'power with' – generates collective action for reducing societal inequities, securing more equitable access to labour, land and financial markets and the development of more responsive and accountable state institutions. These in turn contribute to further processes of empowerment, for example through strengthening the conditions for a productive population by delivering public services that connect to people's needs and wishes, through legal changes to social and political status and through social protection measures – all of which shape patterns of growth that are inclusive and equitable, with the potential for creating a virtuous cycle of empowerment with higher state revenues from a skilled, taxpaying workforce that has an investment in the society it is helping shape rather than being shaped by.

International development actors often fail to take cognisance of much that is already known about these issues, resulting in policies and programmes that may prove to have negative rather than empowering effects. This is why the DAC can use its authoritative position and known capacity for skilful synthesis and dissemination to bring this knowledge to the audience that most needs it. Furthermore, compared with

any one of its member or observer organisations, a DAC Network has a unique potential advantage in exploiting rather than obscuring the multiple perspectives among those who compose it. By making use of its own diversity, POVNET, is well placed to encourage others to recognise the multiple pathways of empowerment. Respecting context and historically derived difference in perspective is an excellent starting point for including in policy dialogues voices and viewpoints that power might be keeping silent. Bearing these points in mind we recommend POVNET pursue three main strands of work – 'intermediate outputs':

(1) Learning and sharing knowledge about empowerment in policy areas related to pro-poor growth

(2) Integrating empowerment into aid instruments, including general budget support, sector wide approaches, support to civil society;

(3) Strengthening internal capacities of DAC member organisations for supporting processes of empowerment

The types of products resulting from these work streams could include separate short briefing papers on empowerment in relation to specific policy areas; a video as a training resource for understanding the operational implications of integrating empowerment into aid instruments; in-country workshops for donor staff and partners of the kind that POVNET has already been facilitating but specifically designed to encourage multiple perspectives and debate; workshops for POVNET members and wider groups of staff from donor agencies, based on a methodology of reflective practice and learning and collaborative work within the DAC. POVNET can add significant value to the work of other parts of the DAC - on themes of evaluation (how to measure empowerment) and with GenderNet and GovNet by identifying the policy and operational implications associated with organised efforts at changing the systemic power arrangements that may be preventing economic growth delivering improved well being for many of those currently living in chronic poverty.

DEFINING EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is fundamentally about power – about the power to redefine our possibilities and options and to act on them, the power within that enables people to have the courage to do things they never thought themselves to be capable of, and the power that comes from working alongside others to claim what is rightfully theirs.

Power is a contentious, sometimes even threatening word in the world of development policy and practice. It is contentious because, as a concept, we can understand it in many different ways and debates about meanings may remain fruitless should they stay at a theoretical level. It is also contentious because these different understandings are themselves shaped by power. When presented in a way that would appear to challenge people's perceptions of the way the world is, or the way they think it should be, talking about power may be threatening. For example, we have found that in some bilateral aid organisations, the word may trigger alarm, particularly when going beyond the analysis of formal political institutions to exploring informal power that is dispersed throughout society and operates in all relationships. Thus, power may resist its naming. Conversely, for those who evoke it, that same action of naming power may be empowering.

Some definitions of empowerment avoid 'power' - for example, one with which POVNET members may be familiar states:

> Empowerment broadens poor people's freedom of choice and action, expanding their assets and capabilities and enabling them… to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.[1]

Later in that same document, this meaning of empowerment is elaborated by explaining the implications of this definition in terms of creating and strengthening democratic institutions, improving livelihoods, reducing discrimination, and overall contributing to the realisation of human rights.

A World Bank publication from 2005 stresses that empowerment is more than participation in decision making because 'it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able to and entitled to make decisions'[2].

Power can usefully be thought of as capacity generated through social relations and as such can be understood as both enabling social change and sustaining the status quo. Rather than as a resource that can be possessed, acquired or lost, power is part of all social relationships and institutions, shaping the limits of what it is possible for people to do or to envisage themselves doing. Power is thus as much a positive force that enables people to bring about changes in their own and others' circumstances as a

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[1] Draft Policy Guidance Note: Social Protection, Poverty Reduction and Pro-poor Growth June 2008: 1
[2] Csaszar 2005: 145

negative constraint to freedom.[3] Structural inequalities mean that some people and social groups are less able to shape their futures than are others. Thus, we understand

> *Empowerment happens when individuals and organised groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realise that vision by changing the relations of power that have been keeping them in poverty.*

Our understanding captures the ideas of freedom of choice and action but it also recognises how power shapes imagination and thus the potential for achieving desired change. Further, when we think about poor people's empowerment, poverty is not seen as an absolute state but one that contrasts to the situation of other people whose own choices and actions affect what those living in poverty are able to do and be. Finally, we see empowerment as a process that changes the idea of who one is vis-a-vis the social institutions that shape one's identity. Hence, referring to empowerment as something that can be built is misleading. It implies an end state that can be reached and judged as having been accomplished. We shall discuss later the risks to pro-poor growth agendas in taking such an approach and explain how *appreciating empowerment as a path rather than a building* enables donors to identify better how they can support poor people's empowerment. Conceptualising empowerment as a process draws attention to issues of reversibility. Legal changes to status - and the expanded opportunities resulting from these - may be easily reversed by a subsequent administration unless these changes are concurrent with *systemic* shifts in historically embedded political, economic and social relations. Such shifts may be a process of slow, incremental change, difficult for donors to observe and measure within their limited time frames for financial support.

DAC members have different organisational understandings of empowerment. These in turn do not necessarily reflect the variety of views held by individual staff members in donor agencies. We found that while many staff concur with the current emphasis on choice and individual autonomy (as reflected in the POVNET citation on page 2) this is complemented with a belief in the importance of what has been described as 'the power within' - people's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge that enables them to imagine their world can be different and therefore act to change it.[4] In this respect, it appears that development agency staff may be more innovative in their thinking than might appear to be the case from an examination of their own organisations' statements. Thus POVNET may play a useful role in helping its members examine how they may be practising empowerment as distinct from defining it.

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[3] See also the presentation made to the DAC by Naresh Singh of the Commission for Legal Empowerment (May 2008) in which he stressed that power should not be understood as a zero sum game.

[4] Csaszar 2005

EMPOWERMENT - PATHS OUT OF POVERTY

Staying poor in today's world is an effect of world history that adversely incorporates poor people into the current global political economy. It is also an effect of locally embedded processes through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live.

ADVERSE INCORPORATION

A study of casually employed labourers in the citrus export producing area of South Africa explored the everyday processes by which certain groups of people are excluded from institutions and networks. The study also identified the wider systemic dynamics of inequality, impoverishment, and conflict which keep the labourers in a situation of chronic poverty and insecurity. The author proposes that the concept of "adverse incorporation" into the wider global economy and society would strengthen our understanding of their situation.

People who are marginalised and excluded from mainstream institutions, systems and networks are nevertheless incorporated in ways that operate to undermine their opportunities for development. Understanding chronic poverty means looking at the intimate and mutually reinforcing links between income poverty and a poor household's lack of social power. Workers find themselves embedded in a patriarchal system which is reinforced both within the household (by fathers and husbands) and in the work context (by farmers and managers). These patriarchal values heavily influence how workers are treated. Women labourers' lack the basic assets necessary for household food production or entrepreneurial activity, and their consequent dependence on insecure paid jobs and on networks of patronage renders them profoundly disadvantaged.

Source: A. Du Toit 2004

Adverse incorporation is a less familiar term than social exclusion but it helpfully illuminates the point that social inclusion is not just a matter of bringing people into society (they are already there but on adverse terms) but of changing the systemic power arrangements that sustain their marginalisation and subordination.[5] Thus our approach to empowerment as a path out of poverty is one which views the constraints on poor people as a product of relationships of unequal power and as David Mosse puts it 'the consequence of normal economic and political relations'.[6]

As a tool for thinking with, we can distinguish between three kinds of empowerment that are inter-connected and iterative: social, economic and political. 'Legal empowerment' defined by Naresh Singh in a presentation to the DAC 'making the

[5] Hickey & Du Toit 2007
[6] Mosse 2007

law work for everyone'[7] is a cross-cutting element in these different types of empowerment. The law is a contributory element to changing the way things are done as well as how people envisage themselves and are seen by others, enhancing their capacity to act to bring about changes in their lives and those around them.

Social empowerment

We understand social empowerment as taking steps to change society so that one's own place within it is respected and recognised on the terms on which the person themselves want to live, not on terms dictated by others.

The extent to which any individual or community can determine for themselves who they are and how they choose to relate with others is determined by structures and relations of power. Power from this perspective is manifested and experienced through institutions (rules of the game) and discourses (what is thinkable, visible, doable). Observable disparities between particular social groups or classes (for example in terms of standards of living or representation in parliament) indicate the operation of power working through these institutions and discourses. It is people – *actors* - who are continuously reproducing or transforming these institutional and discursive structures and relations, although often this is done unconscious of the effect our actions may have on others.

This is where empowerment comes in as a process whereby people develop a sense of and capacity for agency – 'individual power within' and 'collective power with others' – to improve the quality of their social relationships and to secure respect, dignity and freedom from violence, leading purposively or otherwise to changes in the institutions and discourses that are keeping them in poverty. Donors can help this process by (a) checking that they themselves are not helping perpetuate disempowering discourses and institutions and (b) supporting people's own efforts.

The injury done to people who experience discrimination on the basis of labels they are given by society and entrenched ideas about their inferiority or societal taboos around sex, death and dirt goes well beyond that of economic deprivation and lack of political voice. When people are treated as lesser because of the colour of their skin, their sex, what they do for a living, and where they live, they can come to internalise a sense of lack of worth that profoundly affects their sense of what they can do and what they are due by society. The brakes are put on efforts to support people in empowering themselves politically or economically, unless these are complemented by systematic revalorisation of people who are stigmatised and regarded as inferior or lacking by society, advocating their recognition as fully human, and as entitled to the same rights and respect as any other humans.

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[7] Already cited. Power point presentation May 13-14, 2008

Anti-discrimination legislation is important. But in itself it is not sufficient unless accompanied by deliberate efforts to change prevailing attitudes, language and society's informal rules of the game. Political leaders who have been prepared to publicly acknowledge discrimination issues can have national impact, for example in efforts to tackle HIV/AIDS. School text books can reveal alternative histories of a country, told this time from the perspective of those who have been oppressed, as is happening now in the Andean region of South America. The mass media can change public perceptions in relation to those discriminated against because of their sexuality.

These issues of recognition matter, because they affect many dimensions of well being. Good education and health care are not by themselves empowering, as well illustrated by the case of women in Saudi Arabia. The push to extend basic services needs to be accompanied by a parallel emphasis on the way in which services are delivered. In Bolivia health clinics used to be empty of patients because local people felt they were not treated with respect. Services can be technically high quality and still be delivered in ways that make people feel like cattle. Furthermore, when services are delivered in this way they are likely to be less sustainable because users do not feel a sense of responsibility to maintain or improve them. The key word here is 'dignity'. In Rajasthan, when a man from a stigmatised nomadic group was finally allotted a piece of land to live, he commented 'We couldn't have imagined that one day we would be able to live in dignity like others'.[8]

Finally, people living in poverty are often spoken for and spoken about by those who are not poor. In a much-cited piece[9], Gayatri Spivak draws attention to the difference between speaking-for and speaking-about, between, in her words, proxy and portrait. She observes that those who are spoken about may so internalize the way they are represented, that when they come to represent themselves they simply reproduce the portraits that are made of them by others. People need opportunity and political leadership to recognise and name the discrimination and privation they face so they can break the perpetuation of internalised and external discrimination. This means people representing themselves in ways that do not demean them, nor simply re-produce societal discriminations against them. The label 'the poor' is a case in point. Such labelling, particularly in moments of crisis, may shift – or sustain – power relations in ways that trigger social dislocation and prejudice efforts to achieve greater empowerment.

Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment is the capacity of poor women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes on terms which recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible for them to negotiate

[8] Pant 2005: 96

[9] Spivak 1988

a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Economic empowerment means people thinking beyond immediate survival needs and thus able to recognise and exercise agency and choice.

The recent POVNET guidance on pro-poor growth[10] offers considerable scope in terms of strategies for the economic empowerment of people living in poverty. It explicitly recognizes that *patterns* of growth matter as much as the rate of growth. While it gives centre stage to markets and private enterprise in the envisaged growth processes there is also a role for policies to increase people's access to markets in land, labour and capital and for investments in basic social services, social protection and infrastructure. A concern with inequality, and thus with relative poverty, has been added to that of absolute poverty which dominated the donor agenda through much of the 1980s and 1990s. The guidance prioritises investments in the rural economy, and the agricultural sector, where poverty is concentrated. And specific attention is paid to the enhancement of women's market access.

However, more emphasis is required than the POVNET paper provides to recognising that market forces alone cannot help those living in chronic poverty. As recent studies argue, inequalities matter to growth outcomes, particularly inequalities in the distribution of assets. The higher the initial inequalities in the distribution of assets, such as education, land or capital, the less likely it is that a particular growth path will lead to declines in poverty. Inequalities are most resistant to change when they represent the historical evolution of property rights, reinforced by past state policy and persisting social discrimination.

Markets tend to reproduce such deep-seated inequalities. Those who enter the market without assets must rely on their physical labour to meet their daily needs. They are seldom in a position to negotiate the price of their labour or opt for leisure if they do not receive their asking price. They rarely generate a sufficient surplus from their efforts to benefit from access to land or capital markets. Nor do they have the mental security and peace of mind to take the risks necessary to break out of their poverty traps. By contrast, those with considerable assets at their disposal are not only in a position to determine the price at which they will engage with the market. They are also better positioned to take advantage of any new opportunities that may emerge - and to close off such opportunities to those with fewer endowments.

The insecurities associated with relying only on one's labour for living has given rise to highly asymmetrical patron-client relationships in which people pledge their labour and loyalty to powerful patrons in return for access to land or credit and some degree of protection against contingencies. While the spread of market relations may erode (or mutate) some of these paternalist arrangements, unless alternative sources of

[10] OECD 2006 'Promoting Pro-Poor Growth. Key Policy Messages'

security emerge in their place, it will not leave those who have been 'freed' any better off, exemplified by the Du Toit study cited earlier (p.7).

In some places economic growth has led to poverty decline, as in China, Vietnam or India, but even there it has declined more slowly for people from ethnic minorities and lower castes. The same is true in Latin America, despite its longer history of industrialisation and the greater maturity of its markets. Socially marginalised groups not only enter the market with poorer endowments than others but they also receive lower returns to their endowments, an indicator of identity-based discrimination. Findings from a survey of 17 countries in the region reveal that race, ethnicity and class were considered to be the most important determinants of discrimination. Moreover, the degree of labour market discrimination along these lines was believed to be at a similar level to discrimination faced in relation to the courts and police.[11]

Market inequalities reproduce themselves because what underpins them are inequalities of power. Those with power are better able to frame 'the rules of the game' to protect their own privilege. Or, in many cases, to ignore the rules of the game they themselves have framed – for example agricultural subsidies in the OECD.

There are lessons from the field that can provide insights into how empowerment can be facilitated. They relate a) to the promotion of the assets of poor people; b) transformative forms of social protection; c) the 'decent work' agenda; and d) voice and organization for economic citizenship.

Assets

It is clear that land redistribution has been one of the most politically controversial and resisted of redistributive reforms. The current focus of donors is on formal titling of land. While there is a case to be made for this to clear up the legal confusion that surrounds property ownership in some contexts, such as those described by de Soto[12], formal titling can also lead to dispossession of vulnerable members of families and lineage groups in countries like Kenya where customary laws upheld a more equitable, but informal distribution. Women are more likely to benefit from the provision of joint entitlements when it is made mandatory rather than optional.

While substantive redistribution may not have much of an impact on poverty in more densely populated countries like Bangladesh and Ethiopia, more piecemeal redistribution should not be ruled out as a policy option. In West Bengal, it has led to a greater willingness on the part of farmers to invest in their crops, evidence of their greater faith in the future. In Pakistan, the allocation of unused government land to poor people has helped to mobilise them to claim their rights. In Latin American countries, land reform is on-going. And Dzodzi Tskita's analysis of the land reform

[11] Behrman et al.
[12] de Soto 2000

process in Tanzania shows that engagement by civil society actors representing different interest groups in society, including those traditionally denied voice in the policy process, can generate important gains, even with complex tenure systems.[13]

Housing and homestead land are other key assets that can make an enormous difference to livelihoods. In India, a recent study shows that married women's ownership of their homes was associated with lower levels of domestic violence. Various efforts have been made to address social and economic asymmetries in housing and homestead land. In Bangladesh, Grameen Bank has made housing loans conditional on the house being registered in women's names. In South Africa, a group of urban poor men and women were able to take their municipality to court for its failure to take 'reasonable' action to implement the right to housing.

Social protection

Social protection can be designed to address the fundamental insecurity of poor people's livelihoods, thus providing them with the courage and self-confidence to take risks and protest injustice. There is a strong case for redistributive forms of social protection not tied to employment status, thereby reducing the gap between 'good' and 'bad' jobs in the economy. Cash transfer programmes of various kinds, conditional and unconditional, are examples of this as are social pensions. The regularity and predictability with which these are provided, the acceptability of any conditions and the extent to which it is treated as a hand out or a right all influence the kinds of outcomes reported. In South Africa and Namibia, social pensions have led to improvements in the education of grandchildren. They have allowed pensioners to enjoy access to informal credit from grocery stores and have helped to stimulate local trade. Money transferred through an unconditional cash transfer program piloted for the very poorest 10% of the population in Zambia was partly used for consumption but also invested in small livestock and assets. It was also used by some female beneficiaries to start up a traditional savings scheme. At the same time the evidence to date reveals that conditional cash transfers are not automatically a pathway of empowerment and that they have to be designed carefully to secure that effect[14].

Micro-finance, including micro-insurance, is also often considered as an instrument that promotes empowerment. As with conditional cash transfers, findings indicate that the design of the programme is fundamental for such processes to occur. For example, women's ability to use micro-finance to increase incomes and control these incomes are affected by types of collateral requirements, modes of disbursal, loan size and timing, types of savings product. Microfinance can achieve a great deal in terms of helping poor people to smooth consumption flows and send children to school but it can also lead to indebtedness and exclusion of the very poor if financial

[13] Tsikata 2003

[14] Molyneux 2008 forthcoming

sustainability is the rationale of organisations. Microfinance interventions can also provide the basis for collective action around a range of shared concerns. The trust relationships built up within solidarity-based microfinance programs have been used as the basis for community-based insurance schemes. In Uganda, for instance, a health insurance company operates a single risk, not-for-profit health insurance scheme to cover hospital costs in case of illness'.

RURAL WOMEN SECURE A LEGAL IDENTITY IN MALAWI

A social protection programme designed to ensure access to food security during recent droughts in southern Africa had unexpected empowerment benefits. In Malawi, the Dowa Emergency Cash Transfers (DECT) project, implemented by Concern Worldwide in 2006/07, subcontracted Opportunity International Bank Malawi (OIBM) to deliver cash transfers to drought-afflicted rural communities through a mobile banking system.. Setting up this system required registering the women on a computerised database, capturing their fingerprints and photographs for verification purposes, and issuing each woman with a smart-card containing her bank account details.

Apart from ensuring that cash transfers were delivered efficiently and promptly, the DECT achieved a degree of financial inclusion for thousands of rural families who had previously been excluded from financial services. Moreover, evaluations revealed that the women who received identity documents and/or smart-cards felt strongly empowered by the legal recognition that these documents represented. In focus group discussions, several women stated passionately that before the project it was as if they did not exist in the eyes of the state, but now that they had their "papers" they had an identity and their government could no longer ignore them.

Source: S. Devereux et al. 2007

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Public works programmes have a long history of efforts to address the seasonal or crisis-related deficits in the economy. The design of such programmes determines not only their effectiveness as social protection instruments but also the extent to which such programmes can strengthen people's bargaining capacity. They can operate through 'stigma-related' self targeting. Alternatively, they can be designed to promote the right to work. The new National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India contains a number of provisions that seek to make operational the 'rights-based' element: the work guarantee itself backed by an employment allowance if work is not provided; a travel allowance if work provided is more than 5 km. away; wages have to be paid weekly directly to the worker in front of the community; mandatory work facilities, including a crèche; equal wages for men and women with a 33% reservation for women; all documents must be made available for public scrutiny; locally elected officials must undertake social audits.

Overall, lessons from social protection policies are that changes in one sphere of relations – for example in relation to financial institutions enabling women to procure loans - may not necessarily trigger changes in another sphere such as in local politics or within the household. Without such broader processes of change, changes in just this one sphere may be easily reversible. Donors can play a useful role in designing such interventions so they may have a helpful multiplier effect in other spheres.

Decent work

'De-coupling' the provision of basic social protection from employment status does not rule out employment-based social protection based on shared contributions from employees, employers and the state. Nor does it rule out the promotion of 'decent work' for all sections of the labour force, not only those in formal employment. The ILO's 'core labour standards' provides a useful starting point for such an agenda and its supportive approach, helping to build the capacity of workers to organise and claim their rights, may be more productive in the long run than trade sanctions.

Collective action

Finally, the importance of livelihoods in the lives of poor people means that they have provided the most frequent basis for collective action. While trade unions are themselves increasingly aware of their failures in relation to those seeking to earn a living from informal activities, there are a variety of innovative forms of associations that have emerged in response to the challenge of organising these workers. Some organise around specific occupational categories – such as waste pickers, janitors, migrant workers and so on – while others take specific needs as their entry point. Thus we find organisations that focus on housing needs, others that mobilise around land rights while still others have used credit and savings. These kinds of organisations can be seen as an emergent a civil society committed to holding the state accountable to the needs and interests of people in poverty.

Political Empowerment

Our understanding of how political empowerment contributes to pro-poor growth is through increasing equity of representation in political institutions and enhancing the voice of the least vocal so that they can engage in making the decisions that affect the lives of others like them – enhancing their ability to speak about, as well as speak for, themselves, gaining recognition as having a right to engage in the democratic process.

In its guidance on pro-poor growth policy messages, the DAC understands political empowerment of people living in poverty as their capacity to hold the state accountable.[15] It notes that a well functioning state is essential for responding to the

[15] OECD 2006: 36

interests of poor people and it needs to provide the opportunity for their representatives to influence policy making processes.

In a comprehensive review of the literature on the links between good governance, growth and poverty reduction, Merilee Grindle argues that international development agencies need to avoid making simplistic assumptions about a universal causal link between the quality of governance and development and should avoid taking examples of what works in one place and assuming it will work somewhere else.[16]

Grindle concludes there are a number of analytical frameworks that can guide development practitioners in making decisions about what is more likely to work in a particular context without them having to get involved in higher level discussions about the links between good governance, growth and poverty reduction. These include country based institutional and political economy analyses of state structures and political systems of the kind that in fact an increasing number of donors are now undertaking and have been considered by GOVNET.[17] Such analyses are also mentioned in POVNET's pro-poor growth paper. We suggest that poor people's political empowerment offers an additional element for inclusion in such analyses, including addressing what to do in weak states not capable of delivering pro-poor policies. Political empowerment of people living in poverty is a crucial element for consideration linked to concerns about how donors can most usefully support what are often violent and lengthy processes of state formation.[18]

Poor people's mobilization around rights helps to build their individual and collective political capabilities necessary to engage in negotiations over policy. Because empowerment is a process by which people learn to think critically about their own circumstances and possibilities, unlearn prior social conditioning and see things differently, it tends to be a precondition for the kind of collective action that historically has allowed poor and excluded groups to make their voices heard by re-framing their relation to institutionalised power.

Societal groups whose historical experience has been marginalization from politics and decision-making may not have a clear sense of their interests as a group, nor of an agenda for change. This may require the creation of spaces of their own, within which to begin a process of becoming aware of their specific circumstances as a group and articulating an agenda for action to address the specific inequities that they face. Measures for political empowerment are inadequate if they simply involve establishing quotas so that people from particular groups are officially given seats at

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[16] Grindle 2007

[17] Donor Approaches to Governance Assessments OECD DAC GOVNET Conference on Governance Assessments and Aid Effectiveness London, 20-21 February 2008 Conference Report

[18] Van der Borgh 2008:

the table because they are limited to seeking inclusion within a political system that is fundamentally hostile to historically marginalized social groups.

MOSSAMAT'S STORY

Mossamat had been severely impoverished since childhood. In mid-life she joined a landless group organised by the NGO, Nijera Kori where in addition to regularly saving money, the members discussed why they were poor and began to organise meetings and protests when they felt injustices had been inflicted upon them, such as exploitative wages or violence against women that goes unpunished by the authorities. Mossamat was eventually urged by the other members of the group to stand as a candidate in the local elections. In telling the story of her life, she said "The landless in this locality elected me. When I was elected I tried best to serve their interests. I was very shy before I joined this organisation. I couldn't talk, was always afraid….I had never met any policeman. And now when the police arrest somebody, I myself go to the police station… I ask them why a working man has been arrested. I get them freed…. I know who is a criminal and who is a day labourer here. …. The rich have affinity with the rich…. We couldn't protest if they beat our children. We always worked in their house. They take us as their servant…. We want a society where there is equality. There should be no discrimination between rich and poor. My organisation is mobilising for that society."

From Mossamat Jomila Khatun's story told to Naila Kabeer

What makes those who occupy these seats able to advocate effectively for change includes a strong sense of their own efficacy, the political skills to be effective and a constituency behind them who will be able to back them at the ballot box and through other forms of political activism. Research into the nature of citizenship, how it emerges, grows and develops, tells us that we must not make general assumptions about how people – particularly those living in poverty - understand their roles and responsibilities in the wider community, nor about their expectations in relation to the role of the state that they may feel is distant, absent or even hostile to them.

Political empowerment may originate in struggles over local economic or social issues. For this, donors need to be willing to give support to social movements, including non-project-based institutional funding to pay for administrative support and premises, and to support initiatives that include rights education, economic literacy and other educative programmes that equip members of these groups with the skills and knowledge with which to enter public and the political arenas, as is the case with the support to Nijera Kori and other similar organisations, illustrated through the story of Mossamat above. But, as we shall now discuss, more is required than this.

It has been argued that 'empowering the poor' through grass roots organisations and popular participation cannot by itself be the solution to systemic reproduction of unequal social relations. Effective change is often based on coalitions between state

and civil society actors. One cannot achieve greater inclusion solely or even primarily around civil society. The state and political parties both have central roles to play. The role of the state is to achieve large collective goals, facilitating co-ordination within civil society and countering market based exploitation. Political parties have a central role in aggregating interests, negotiating compromise and balancing state power. Such a polity offers the best prospects for excluded and historically subordinated groups to be brought into political processes through a combination of representative and deliberative institutions. However, as Peter Houtzager argues, it would be naïve to assume that significant long term shifts in favour of subordinate groups can always take place without violence and disruption[19]

While an effective and accountable state may be a necessary condition for poor people's voices to be effective in shaping policy, by itself it may not be sufficient, suggests David Mosse,[20] because of the structures of power relations in society that impede poor people's representation in politics. Indeed, a DAC report on Ghana notes pro-poor growth issues tend not to be priority vote-catchers.[21]

The power that people have (as individuals and groups) depends upon the capacity of others (for example, labour union leaders and party workers) to define social classifications for them and then to speak on their behalf. Political organisations do not reflect any naturally occurring classes, castes, ethnicities, and the like, but rather manufacture these categories through the process of determining who gets political representation.[22] Poor people in Bolivia were politically mobilised as workers in the revolution of 1951. Now their children and grandchildren are mobilised as 'indigenous'. Mobilizing around a newly created identity may secure other kinds of rights as well as political ones and it may be a purposively staggered process. In Brazil leaders of a movement for women's land rights first sought to get rural women recognised as workers and then as members of the unions because union membership carried rights to social security. Only after they had won the right to social security did they began to lobby for women's land rights – the more challenging agenda.

Finally, there are 'deepening democracy' approaches to political empowerment concerned with sustaining more substantive citizen participation in the democratic process than is often found in representative democracy alone. These include increasingly common models of participatory or co- governance – including

[19] Houtzager 2003
[20] Mosse 2007
[21] OECD/DAC 2007 Promoting pro-poor growth in Ghana: implementation challenges and issues for donors
[22] Mosse 2007:25

participatory budgeting, building civil society to hold state institutions accountable and deliberative democratic institutions such as citizens' juries.[23]

Making judgements about evidence: evaluating empowerment

What is evaluated and how it is evaluated depends on how empowerment is conceptualised. In this regard, we look briefly at donor expectations concerning the speed and quality of change and then consider some methodological challenges.

Expectations

A number of points must be considered when making judgements about whether empowerment has occurred. These include whether empowerment is individual or collective, the extent to which ambition is greater than the time frame provided for, and whether the donor goals have shifted during the project lifetime.

In evaluating empowerment we need to distinguish between collective empowerment leading to structural changes in power relations as distinct from partial empowerment of some individuals who because of their overall societal position within a relatively unchanged status quo may nevertheless find themselves at risk of losing what they had previously gained. Observers' views on such partial empowerment will be influenced by their theories of change and the expectations from their interventions associated with these. For example, an evaluation of an INGO's empowerment-focused literacy programme in developing countries concluded it had failed in its intentions to change the systemic marginalisation of the women participants. Rather than challenging the status quo, women sought ways of adapting themselves better to it. Instead of overturning established gender relations, women sought to impress their men with their new housewifely skills, their mastery of polite feminine ways. Rather than rediscovering a discarded minority culture and language, women used every opportunity to improve their fluency in the dominant language. Rather than subverting orthodoxy, women were keen to lay claim to received wisdom.

However, the programme had been relatively successful in enabling a minority of participants to expand their own room for manoeuvre, while without changing the social practices that kept women collectively at a disadvantage. 'If you can't beat them, join them' may be the most that such programmes offer to those most able to respond. The report's authors comment that the situation of the remaining majority may change much more slowly and through wider processes of economic and social development rather than any outcome of a project or policy. In brief, the authors argue for development agencies to be more modest in their expectations. From that perspective, the evaluation found that the programme had made some positive

[23] Gaventa 2006

differences that mattered 'immensely to women who have few allies and few resources.' [24]

In terms of looking at collective, as distinct from individual empowerment, donor funded community driven development projects have been taken as a proxy indicator. Findings from a World Bank evaluation [25] indicate the strongest performance was in cases where there were pre-existing organisations of people living in poverty such as SEWA in India and AKRSP in Pakistan and these organisations had generally been built up over a considerable time, suggesting that empowering poor people is a long term process and best not undertaken by officials with short-term horizons and no downward accountability.

A key lesson from all these studies is that donors will not be able to learn from and improve upon modest gains if they expect too much. Exaggerated expectations place an impossible burden on the implementing organisations that may 'spin' the story to attribute more impact than in their hearts they know is realistic.

Another watch point is to avoid assessing empowerment against changed goal posts, as one theory of empowerment is replaced by another during the programme's life time; such an experience is recounted in an ethnography of an aid project aimed at supporting the empowerment of marginalised tribal peoples living in western India.[26] Such shifts can have serious consequences for the programme's capacity to achieve its anything, if donors change their mind about what impacts they expect to see.

Methods

A few years ago the World Bank explored multi-disciplinary perspectives to measuring empowerment. One of the conclusions by Uphoff in the subsequent publication[27], related to the trap of misplaced concreteness in relation to power. Empowerment is not a thing but a process – or as we said earlier, a path not a building. Empowerment can only be judged through its effects.[28] Accordingly, in relation to a definition of empowerment defined as increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform these into desired actions and outcomes, the Bank attempted to standardise measures of these effects so as to make cross-country comparisons. It was felt that without quantification of the links between empowerment and poverty reduction, support by donors and governments to poor people's empowerment would not be forthcoming. A set of indicators were identified in relation to changes to asset bases (financial, social, physical etc) and to the

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[24] Fiedrich,& Jellema, 2003: 180

[25] Kumar et al. 2006

[26] Mosse 2005. There are numerous anecdotal reports of this happening in other projects and countries.

[27] Uphoff 2003

[28] A way of understanding this is to think of empowerment as like gravity which we know has an effect when an apple falls on our head.

institutions that shaped people's capacity for agency. But measuring institutions is a challenge because of the huge gap that exists between the presence of sets of rules and the messy, politicised and socially constructed reality of the enactment of those rules.[29] The Bank consultants had found that institutions are also processes rather than concrete things and therefore very difficult to measure in any quantifiable way that would allow for cross-context comparisons.

Uphoff also stressed that even when looking for effects in terms of changes to people's lives, material or otherwise, the starting point has to be one's definition of power and the concept of empowerment that flows from that. On that basis, how could we then evaluate efforts to facilitate empowerment on the basis of the definition of empowerment proposed at the start of this paper?

A useful starting point is our definition's emphasis on change. Such change can be captured through participatory methods such as Most Significant Change[30] when people who have been subjects of efforts to support their empowerment identify what has been the most important change for them. These methods are themselves empowering, providing space for people to reflect on their lives and what has been happening to them. The evaluation of the Nijera Kori programme cited earlier did this through collecting oral life histories, such as Mossamat's story (p.16).

What such methods cannot offer is cross-country comparison. Indicators of empowerment may vary from one context and time to another. Speaking in public might be a sign of empowerment but elsewhere, the power of staying silent might also be a sign. Participatory methods in which people define for themselves the empowering process and the factors that contributed to it, although valuable in themselves, reveal different stories from which it is difficult to generalise. Nevertheless, in any such specific context, such methods need not rely only on people's own subjective experiences.

[29] Holland and Brook 2005:98

[30] Developed by Rick Davies. http://mande.co.uk/

NIJERA KORI'S INDICATORS OF EMPOWERMENT

NK's strategy is to build the organisation of landless women and men through a strategy of group formation, to promote their awareness of their rights and entitlements and to support their social mobilisation activities around issues which they considered to be important. The assessment therefore included indicators relating to political knowledge and awareness of rights, participation in informal justice mechanisms within the community, participation in the political process, collective action around injustices of various kinds, including violence against women, fairer wages and land rights. In addition, the study asked group members what, if any, changes their activities as NK members had achieved beyond the group membership. One of the most compelling findings from the study was that NK members were far more likely than those yet to be organised by NK to express the view that the quality of justice had improved in their community in the last ten years. Women members of NK also believed that domestic violence had gone along with public forms of violence against women and that women's mobility had increased in the public domain.

Source: N. Kabeer (forthcoming)

In the case of Nijera Kori, complementary methods were used that aimed at an objective assessment through comparing communities with groups organised by Nijera Kori with those where the organisation was intending to work in the future. In this case the measure of assessment used to compare the two sets of communities related to the organisation's theory of empowerment, in other words what it had aimed to achieve in terms of observable changes as described in the box above.

In addition to the three main intermediate outputs discussed below, there is potential for POVNET to collaborate with the DAC Evaluation network exploring how to evaluate empowerment.

RECOMMENDED THEMES/OUTPUTS FOR POVNET 'S WORK ON EMPOWERMENT

In this part of the paper we identify some possible 'intermediate outputs' or aspects of empowerment that POVNET might wish to pursue in relation to the role of international aid. Although we have used the categories of social, economic and political as useful devices for illuminating different inter-connected facets of empowerment, we have also emphasised empowerment as an indivisible process. For that reason we do *not* recommend that POVNET divide up its work in such a fashion. Instead we propose areas where we believe POVNET can add real value in relation firstly to learning and sharing about how policies can be designed to support the empowerment of those living in poverty, secondly the operational implications for the design of aid instruments and, lastly strengthening internal donor capacity to support

empowerment processes. What follows are some conceptual context, illustrated with examples along with some possible products from each work stream.

Learning and sharing knowledge about empowerment in policy areas related to pro-poor growth

This area of work concerns on the one hand pulling together and disseminating what is already known and, on the other developing tools for thought in relation to understanding how policy choices are made for supporting processes of empowerment.

Synthesising and disseminating existing knowledge for emerging policy areas
POVNET's added value would be to synthesise experiences and learning from the last two decades in relation to evolving approaches to empowerment and participation that need to become incorporated into pro-poor growth policy areas. For example, many of the practical right-based challenges in relation to a policy theme such as low carbon growth relate to long standing bodies of knowledge such as land, agriculture, shelter, livelihoods, migration, forests, sustainable energy use, water management etc are currently not being recognised in international discussions in relation to this policy agenda.

Incorporating learning about empowerment leads to questions about how different kinds of knowledge and values shape the rules of the game and policy choices. Whose voice is heard and whose is excluded local, national and global arenas? Knowledge concerning the societal and political processes through which power operates is vital to ensuring a more inclusive and democratic approach to the policy agendas. Research into policy networks reveals how change happens – or is blocked – through the interactions between institutions, discourses and relations between individual actors. This is particularly relevant for identifying how to optimally support the perspectives and voices of those living in poverty.

There is growing evidence that an empowered citizenry working with civil society and state institutions at local, national and global levels makes institutions more equitable, responsive and accountable. For example, without a citizenship approach to climate change, low carbon growth strategies run the risk not only of being institutionally ineffective but also of exacerbating existing inequities and human rights failures. POVNET can make it clear that international development organisations cannot empower citizens – or create social activists. But they can encourage the conditions under which such empowerment is possible.

A similar analysis and synthesis of what is known about empowerment can be applied to other important pro-poor growth policy themes, including themes such as the impact of changes in international trade arrangements (see the box on adverse

incorporation) and the role of cash transfers as a social protection mechanism (see the section on economic empowerment above). A possible product could be a series of short (2000 word) policy briefings that could be used on a standalone basis for dissemination at relevant conferences and meetings on the topic in question as well as incorporating the complete set into a single folder with a generic title relating to designing growth policies that facilitate poor people's empowerment.[31]

Policy choices for multiple pathways of empowerment

A second activity in relation to policy agendas, relates to POVNET's potential contribution in clarifying how policy choices are made and the impact of these in what pathways of empowerment are identified.

Even when we do not realise it, we are using theories every day in explaining social reality to ourselves and to others. These include explanations shaped by ideology and values and absorbed through our education and upbringing; these may have become so embedded that we no longer examine them nor ask if they are the most useful for our purpose or whether we are using them as well as we could. Making explicit and sharing with colleagues our explanations of change - and our theories of empowerment that derive from these - can reveal that we may be using different theories, or mixing and matching them in different ways. When colleagues argue over which actions to prioritise, much of our disagreement may be due to different but possibly unexamined views of the way the world works.

For example, if one favours the approach that society changes through unintended consequence of aggregate action of individuals, each seeking to achieve their own happiness, then the associated theory of empowerment is creating an environment that enables all individuals to pursue their life choices. Possible actions for poor people's empowerment might include encouraging the removal of bureaucratic restrictions and regulations – for example with small and micro enterprise development. On the other hand, if one believes that society changes through new ideas and beliefs, then the theory of empowerment will be influencing and transforming ideas and values in society. Possible actions might include mass media campaigns against discriminatory informal rules of the game, re-writing text books, targeting opinion leaders and role models and training front line workers to deliver services with respect.

No one approach is right and the others wrong. Each provides an explanatory entry point to making sense of complex reality. In any context, one theory may be better at explaining that reality than another. But, in the absence of critical reflection, people may go into 'default mode' and automatically favour just one or two of them. Because

[31] See for example the recently launched IDS 'In Focus' series

governments (and donor agencies) are often composed of factions, each with different ideologically based theories of change, they may adopt a variety of policy interventions based on these differences. While this might look to be political fudge, it has the unintended consequence similar to a venture capital approach, allowing multiple paths to pro-poor growth.

Donor governments recognise this problem (if only implicitly) when they position themselves differently in relation to what actions they are prepared to support directly through their own programming resources and those which they may fund through intermediaries such as international NGOs. Aid instruments, which we now go onto discuss can also be designed to allow a diverse group of intermediaries each to choose which pathway of empowerment they wish to support, as is the case of DFID's Challenge Fund, the Bangladesh Economic Empowerment Programme.

In Annex A to this paper we attempt a tool for thought – a first rough identification of the most commonly held theories of change in the western intellectual tradition and therefore likely to be most influential in shaping development agency approaches to development strategies and hence to plans and actions to support processes of empowerment. A product from this area of work would be an improved version of this tool, supported by one day training workshops at the country level for more informed and reflexive policy dialogue between government and donor staff.

Integrating empowerment into aid instruments

Development agencies and governments cannot empower. The most they can do is to facilitate and support people's own efforts. POVNET can build on its already established and recognised role of exploring with donors and their partners in aid recipient countries how aid can be optimally used for this purpose. For example, in designing delivery of basic services through sector wide approaches, governments should look for the greatest possible multiplier effects while checking that the implementation as well as design does not impede these effects. The key message is that the details in the design of such instruments are crucial if they are to be paths of empowerment. Another example are conditional cash transfers in which similar to the delivery of basic services, the manner in which they are designed and implemented can have a negative or positive effect on empowerment

There is much already known along these lines concerning how public sector policy reform through general budget support, sector wide approaches can be designed to create a positive environment for empowerment. However, there are messages to be drawn from this knowledge that are not succinctly available and we briefly touch on two of these below with reference to approaches to supporting state institutions for policy reform and support to civil society.

Supporting policy reform

State institutions can play a vital role in facilitating poor people's empowerment. In appreciating this, however, we should be aware of the internal heterogeneity of such institutions, both in terms of the state's possible commitment to an empowerment agenda and whose interests they may be representing. A power analysis of the kind undertaken by some donors needs to consider not only formal institutions such as parliament, public administration and the executive, but also the cultural meanings, social networks and structural relationships of power that shape these. This helps explain why for example legislation may have little impact on the inequalities it was designed to address. POVNET could liaise with GOVNET to contribute to its on-going work on this subject, with a joint briefing paper as a product.

One of the key lessons to be shared with GOVNET is that donors must avoid perceiving state and civil society as binaries in opposition to each other, thus missing opportunities to support networks and organisations that are straddling the divide. Donors can help by supporting those working across the state /society borders and brokering connections. This can be more effective than programmes that focus narrowly on either governance reform or civil-society strengthening. DFID in Peru used its strategic impact fund very effectively to support policy networks in this way. The box below illustrates a case from World Bank in Mexico.

PRO-POOR POLICY REFORM THROUGH STATE-CIVIL SOCIETY ALLIANCES

A study from Mexico looked at how reformers in the federal government (with World Bank and others' support) facilitated empowerment through creating regional economic development councils with elected representatives of indigenous producer organisations. The author compares this experience with other rural development programmes in terms of the willingness of state government officials to share power with civil society producer organisations. In all cases, he noted that this willingness depended heavily on the presence of a faction within the state institution prepared to go into partnership with autonomous social organisations. He concludes that pro-poor change occurs when there are coalitions between state and society actors who share a common reform agenda and apply simultaneous top-down and bottom-up pressure to neutralise resistance from established rural elites. He emphasises the need for external agencies, such as the World Bank, to support reformers with progressive track records and to continue to support them when they move to another institution'

Source: J. Fox 2004

Finally, POVNET has already initiated a series of developing country workshops to find what country level stakeholders need to make growth more pro-poor and how DAC-POVNET can better assist them in addressing these challenges. We recommend that building on this initiative, and as part of the emphasis the Accra Agenda for Action places on broadening country level policy dialogue, POVNET

work with donor representatives in the country concerned to support public debates open to the media, poor people's representatives, civil society, government officials, donor staff, parliamentarians, researchers etc as to pathways of empowerment and how these support pro-poor growth. The aim should not be consensus but diversity of voice, with attention paid to facilitating the process so that power does not operate to silent some participants. Such facilitation could include prior preparatory workshops for those otherwise likely to be silenced, such as women, people with little education and not fluent in the country's official language.

Support to civil society

As noted earlier, many bilateral donors follow a multi-pathway approach to empowerment, by supporting civil society actors on the one hand (sometimes indirectly through their own county's NGOs) and government programmes. with direct budget support on the other. However, such parallel funding has to be carefully undertaken. Donors should take care to avoid conflating NGOs with 'civil society'.

Support to civil society organisations – as to governments - makes donors into local political actors whether they wish it or not. The fact this is a political choice should be recognised rather than ignored. Donors may perceive a citizens' organisation as having an agenda that too overtly challenges the status quo and decide not to support it. The basis for making this decision needs to be clear and will depend on the context. Also to be taken into account is that on the one hand state building and pro-poor change can occur through social movements that are contesting established values and structural power relations; on this basis a 'challenging' CSO might warrant support. On the other hand it is important that donors' interventions do not undermine citizens' own efforts at problem solving and put at risk the very autonomy that donors value about civil society; on this basis a decision not to fund might be the best one.

Finally, support must be designed so that donor procedural and reporting requirements do not undermine the capacity of citizen's groups to work together on their own agendas. Challenge funds, for example, requiring organisations to compete with each other, can result in breaking up delicately balanced coalitions. Small grants can often be more effective than larger sums. The higher transaction costs have to be balanced by the potential for greater long term impact.

A CITIZENSHIP APPROACH TO SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY

Citizenship strengthening leads to better informed people who can understand their rights and are able to constructively and effectively engage in claim-making, collective action, governance and political processes;

Citizen participation in civil society organisations' (CSO) governance, programming, monitoring, and accountability manifests itself as critically (self)reflective, democratically functioning and accountable CSOs that are responsive to the rights, values, aspirations, interests and priority needs of their constituencies;

Citizen participation in local development and service delivery results in local development and service delivery designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated with increased citizen participation. This helps empower whilst reducing dependency;

Citizen/CSO participation in advocacy and structural change builds the capacity of CSOs to undertake advocacy work that really represents the needs of those they represent – with, as far as possible, individual citizens gaining a direct voice in advocating for their rights, needs and interests;

Citizens'/dignity/culture/identity is enhanced through activities such as radio stations in local languages, popular festivals and support to historic sites that contribute to a climate of mutually respectful social relationships between citizens and with the state, and engendering trust in others based on positive experiences.

Source; I. Guijt 2005

In association with GOVNET, brief guidance concerning support to civil society for the empowerment of those living in poverty could be developed on the basis of the framework in the box above.

Strengthening donor capacity for supporting empowerment

Donors will strengthen their own capacity and skills to be more responsive to developing countries' needs.[32]

The pro-poor growth agenda has important implications for the way donors support partner countries. It is not 'a business as usual agenda' and 'more of the same' will not be sufficient.[33] If donors can change the way they do business, they will find that empowerment delivers aid effectiveness. We have identified three themes for donor staff learning:

(1) Empowerment is context specific
(2) Empowerment is not necessarily predictable and may take a long time

[32] Accra Agenda for Action 2008
[33] OECD Promoting Pr0-Poor Growth: Foreword

(3) Donors need to be aware of the effects of power in their relations with others.

Firstly, effective aid means learning about the particular context in which donors are working. What works in one place, may not work in another or even in the same place at a different moment in history or with a different group of donors. Suggesting something as 'best practice' may be disempowering for others; dissenting voices may refrain from comment and thus from providing an alternative point of view that would help expose the complexity of reality and reveal that there rarely are quick-fix and off-the-peg solutions, including to empowerment! Such learning is becoming a significant practical challenge for many donor staff, much of whose time is spent in donor co-ordination meetings or in reporting to their own management. There may also be resistance to undertaking power, politics and political economy analyses because they do indeed point 'to the need for a profound transformation of the way donors are doing business.'[34]

Secondly, empowerment is not predictable; nor can it be expected necessarily to happen within the time frame of a donor's budgetary allocation. At a conference on concepts of women's empowerment, a participant from the South commented how she had wanted to say in a meeting with a representative of a donor agency: 'Just look at yourself. Do you think that this woman will go from A to B with 6000 Euros? Your empowerment has taken a lifetime of support from the state'.[35]

A logical framework analysis may prove not to be the most useful instrument in designing an 'empowerment' programme and it may actually be counter-productive resulting in disempowerment. Because of disbursement pressures and the need to achieve targets, the challenge for donors and their partner governments is to avoid distorting or undermining self-generating processes.

Thirdly, and most importantly empowerment is about transforming relations of power so that women and men can imagine and shape 'the social and economic choices of the future'.[36] Power has an adverse effect when we impose our own point of view, alternative ways of understanding and tackling problems are ignored or dismissed as irrelevant; those putting them forward feel disempowered and will drop out of the conversation. Ethnographic scrutiny of two recent DAC conferences revealed how power works in this exclusionary fashion.[37] Hence supporting the empowerment of others requires self-awareness of how power operates in our relationship with them. A

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[34] OECD DAC GOVNET Conference on Governance Assessments and Aid Effectiveness London, 20-21 February 2008 'Conference report ' http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/16/27/40266891.page:3

[35] From unpublished report of Pathways of Women's Empowerment conference, February 11-12 2008

[36] Sida 1998: 13).

[37] Unpublished research undertaken by Eyben at the Development Centre/DAC conference on ownership (September 2007) and the DAC GOVNET conference on governance indicators (February 2008).

first step to creating an enabling environment for empowerment is to change ourselves. The organisational and individual critical self-reflection that this requires delivers benefits for donors as well as the others they seek to help. Like them, they also will learn and think differently, to imagine new possibilities and to debate alternative choices. Empowerment is infectious.

Training4Dev could be asked to organise workshops for country and head office donor staff together on these issues. These workshops could explore how POVNET member organisations may be practising empowerment as distinct from defining it. We would encourage these be designed with a critically reflective learning approach including a consideration of how donor staff behaviour may have a disempowering effect on others. Material to support such events might include a video edited on the basis of existing case studies such as that of Nijera Kori used in this paper, as well as brief (3-4 page) guidance notes - for example, identifying the issues that need to be explored when appraising sector programmes, issues of time frames and expectations, support to civil society etc and summarising the connections between theories of change and theories of how empowerment happens.

Just as empowerment can be infectious, so can disempowerment. When power is not addressed in international spaces, so those thus disempowered may replicate this failure and organise national fora and meetings in a way that has equally disempowering effects. Changed behaviour starts at home. The DAC could set a good example in how it organises conferences and meetings. We recommend POVNET approach the Development Centre, one of whose staff has already expressed an interest in exploring this issue.

CONCLUSION: POVNET'S ADDED VALUE

International development actors often fail to take cognisance of much that is already known about how empowerment happens, resulting in policies and programmes that may prove to have negative rather than positive effects for pro-poor growth. This is why the DAC can use its authoritative position, extensive outreach and known capacity for skilful synthesis and dissemination to bring this knowledge to the audience that most needs it.

In addition to all of this, we suggest there is an additional strength that perhaps some had considered was a weakness. This is the diversity of views within any DAC network, including - we presume - within POVNET. Multiple perspectives are required when trying to interpret the complex and ever shifting realities of development for steering change in the direction we would like it to go. Learning about and debating other people's perspectives, including the perspectives of people living in poverty, helps create an enabling environment for empowerment. By celebrating its own diversity, a network such as POVNET, is well placed to encourage

others to recognise the importance of making space for difference and for including voices and perspectives that power might be keeping silent. The recommendations we have made concerning future areas of work are based on this underlying presumption.

At the same time POVNET members, as staff based in head offices, are at a disadvantage in communicating about facilitating changes in the lives of those living in poverty. POVNET scope for influence is through policy-based mechanisms such as sector support. Most of what it can do is to encourage colleagues in country offices to create the spaces for dialogue so that different perspectives based on grounded experiences of reality may be entertained. Thus the second presumption informing our recommendations is that POVNET members will be taking the opportunity to learn with others, rather than simply communicating practices from which they are themselves are distant.

To that end we recommend the POVNET task group enhance its own understanding through *a collective immersion/reality check in a community of poor people.* Such immersions are now becoming well-established practice among some donor agencies and one of their great strengths is when a group of people undertake it as joint learning initiative in relation to a longer term engagement on the issue.

Exploring empowerment in the work of the DAC

Empowerment is an issue relevant for the DAC as a whole. At the minimum, other working groups and networks need to be aware of how ignoring the effects of power can unintentionally trigger processes of disempowerment. More positively, there are win-win opportunities from the potential multiplier effect of empowerment if policies and programmes are appropriately designed. Specifically we recommend that POVNET approach:

- The Network on Evaluation to explore methodologies for assessing empowerment;
- The Network on Environment in relation to empowerment and pro-poor carbon-neutral growth;
- GOVNET in relation to its work on governance assessments and also to the role of civil society;
- GENDERNET to identify synergies and overlaps, bearing in mind that much of the development research on empowerment has been in relation to women's empowerment.

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ANNEX A EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES

1. Theory of change. Society changes through unintended consequence of aggregate action of individuals seeking to achieve their own happiness.
   Theory of empowerment *Creating an environment that enables all individuals to pursue their life choices*, including:
   - Providing basic human needs in education, health, water, shelter etc,
   - Ensuring security of livelihoods through social protection and redistribution of assets;
   - Implementing the rule of law to protect poor people from violence
   - Removing bureaucratic restrictions e.g. with micro enterprise development;
   - Ensuring access to information e.g. in minority languages/ community radio
   - Legislation and institutional reforms removing barriers to decent work

2. Theory of change Society changes through technological development.
   Theory of empowerment *Encouraging access to technological progress for all* including:
   - Investing in economic infrastructure
   - Expanding access to formal education for girls and minority groups
   - Providing training in technical skills
   - Designing empowering and accessible technologies for those with disabilities
   - Bridging the digital divide

3. Theory of change Society changes through transformed beliefs, ideas and
   Theory of empowerment *Influencing/transforming ideas and values in society* including:
   - Strengthening people's sense of self worth through support to cultural activities such as street theatre, popular music, community radio and oral history
   - School text book materials challenging role stereotypes
   - Technical support to political parties to expand diversity of candidates
   - Training front line workers to deliver services with respect

4. Theory of change Society changes through purposive collective action
   Theory of empowerment. *Supporting the mobilisation of poor and marginalised people* including
   - Trade unions for poorly paid and exploited labour
   - Grass roots women's groups aimed at changing inequitable gender relations

- Advocacy networks to challenge identity based inequalities
- Deepening democracy approaches including investment in citizen education

5. Theory of change Society changes through contestation and negotiations between different interest groups.
   Theory of empowerment *Supporting changing power relations and structures* including

   - Peaceful demonstrations and marches
   - Heterodox policy research institute to consider alternative political and economic models
   - Re-distribution of assets such as in land reform programmes
   - Capacity development for poor and under-resourced nations in international trade and climate change negotiations

ANNEX B TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of Reference, preparatory study for 2009-2010 POVNET Work Programme: Empowering poor women and men to participate in and benefit from growth

I. BACKGROUND

1. Discussion of future POVNET work on the theme of empowerment has shown that there is a need to conceptualize the term ***empowerment*** and to ensure a strong impact potential of that work**.** Following its meeting on 4th March 2008, The DAC has decided to retain in its 2009-10 Work Programme, two proposals for its Network on Poverty Reduction (POVNET). These are:

- Implementing and validating the policy guidance on promoting pro-poor growth.
- Empowering poor women and men to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from growth.

2. In respect of the ***empowerment*** theme, Povnet wishes to commission a limited study to advance ideas on how best to operationalise, pursue, achieve and sustain empowerment in its upcoming work and how to communicate and disseminate products that will have the desired impact on individuals and groups living in poverty. The ultimate aim is to use this study;

- to set clear directions for POVNET's forthcoming work on empowerment and pro-poor growth and to build a common understanding between member states with regards to what empowerment means in the area of growth,
- how this can be effectively pursued by donors, achieved and sustained, and
- what is required in terms of actions and processes of change.

II. OBJECTIVE

3. The objective of the consultancy is to propose to POVNET a framework for how empowerment should be conceptually understood and operationally explored, and to set directions for forthcoming work within the 2009-10 POVNET Work Programme on *Empowering poor women and men to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from growth* (see annex).

4. The study shall:

- Provide an outline of what empowerment means in conceptual terms in relation to pro-poor economic growth, identifying and assessing current and innovative

conceptual understandings and practical implementation of empowerment for women and men living in poverty.

- Give guidance in how POVNET can look at evidence and provide guidance (normative and operational) as to how empowerment can be promoted and realised.
- Suggest and outline two to three specific directions or themes which POVNET could pursue with regard to empowerment and growth, which build on POVNET's completed work on pro-poor growth.
- Suggest the type(s) of product POVNET should produce, to best ensure maximum impact and to make sure it meets a clear demand from agencies.
- Identify a clear value added and comparative of what Povnet could produce on empowerment.

III. SCOPE OF WORK – ASSIGNMENT AND DELIVERABLES

5. This study is an initial exploration of what empowerment needs to encompass and address to make it cutting-edge and relevant as well as to add value to POVNET's policy work on pro-poor growth. The study should set a working direction and boundaries to forthcoming work on the theme.

6. The study should not exceed five person-weeks of consultancy, which should include the following stages and contents:

i) Proposals for a conceptualisation of empowerment likely to gain consensus in POVNET, based on a review of the current debate, research and practice on empowerment, particularly in connection with pro-poor economic growth (local, regional and global).

ii) Suggest two to three specific directions (themes) to explore in depth in POVNET work on empowerment.

iii) Clarify and identify the demand for work on empowerment, the legal implications and frameworks that need to be considered and the value added of POVNET contributions, what product(s) to develop and how to get messages across to decision makers and practitioners for maximum impact.

IV. TIME SCHEDULE

7. The assignment is expected to commence at the beginning of June 2008 and to be completed by 15 September 2008. In total, five consultancy weeks are allocated to finalise the assignment.

V. REPORTING

8. The consultant/s will work independently, but should consult with the POVNET secretariat as the first port of call, should there be a need for clarification during the time of work. The consultant/s should also confer with the POVNET bureau. A presentation of the findings of the work will be made to the next POVNET meeting in October 2008.

9. The consultant/s is/are responsible for carrying out the specified tasks described above. Following discussions with the POVNET secretariat before the final draft is submitted, the consultant should outline conceptual as well as operational directions in a final document not exceeding 20 pages.

VI. REFERENCE LITERATURE

10. The period of consultancy will be backed up by collaboration and provision of background material such as published POVNET policy messages, and draft reports from ongoing work within the POVNET task teams. The consultant/s should consider the compilation of sources, and interrogate the references whenever necessary during the process of producing the preparatory study.