Analytical Considerations of 'Power'
as the Basis and the Goal of 'Empowerment'

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The concept/objective of '**empowerment**' is one of the most abstract and contingent phenomena that development agencies ever deal with. This is because the term derives from and depends on the protean, multi-faceted phenomenon of **power**, something understood intuitively but seldom analyzed and made concrete The inherent ambiguity and elusiveness of 'power' makes devising operational strategies for 'empowerment' extremely difficult. Arbitrary definitions of 'what is power' give only nominal advantage. Effective solutions need to be grounded in and reflective of real-world relationships, constraints and motivations -- not just in words, however lofty and inspiring these may be.

Empowerment is commonly understood as *the condition of having power and of being able to exercise it and obtain the benefits thereof*. This means that *empowerment* cannot be properly measured or achieved without a valid and practical understanding of what constitutes *power*. The term *power*, however, has long been one of the most perplexing and contested concepts in the social sciences, even though the word gets used continuously in academic discourse and even more often in everyday discussions.

We need to use language to communicate, but we should remain aware that the words we use do not necessarily represent anything **real**, i.e., something that has an existence of its own, not being just mental constructions whose 'reality' depends more upon subjective consensus rather than having some objective, demonstrable existence.

Many of the words that we use are really just labels or categories that help us to explain and act upon the real world -- but they do not really exist in themselves, in the way that an automobile or a constitution does. This does not mean that they are unimportant, or that they have no effects upon people's lives. Some of the most 'powerful' words are abstractions. But we should be clear about the ontological status of the words we use, whether they are material, socially constructed, or essentially mental fabrications.

It is argued here that the term *empowerment* -- like *power* -- does not exist in its own right but is rather a reflection or representation of *other things* that do exist in more than mental reality. This does not mean that we cannot measure or achieve *empowerment*. The elements that go into *empowerment* exist in material as well as mental ways, and they have definite, real-world consequences. So their summation in the term *empowerment* conveys significant meanings, and it has great relevance. However, dealing with something as complex as empowerment requires more sophistication and deeper thought than when we are dealing with a phenomenon whose ontological status is simpler and more material, being more concrete and not so abstract.

This Expert Group Meeting will be engaging with the term *empowerment* to seek greater clarity on how the UN System can contribute to greater empowerment for poverty reduction, social integration, and productive and decent work for all. This paper is a prefatory contribution to the EGM, to assist in making more concrete and ascertainable the term *power*, which is at the core of any disciplined and actionable treatment of the term *empowerment*.

There is fairly easy agreement that empowerment is *the condition of possessing and exercising whatever it is that confers power*. But then there is no agreed definition of *power* that grounds and informs everyone's use of the term *power*. This paper aims for some agreement on what is *power*, so that the term *empowerment* can become a more meaningful and actionable concept.

I. **Weber's Analysis of Power**

The most widely cited and the most influential analytical treatment of *power* is still that by the German social scientist Max Weber, whose consideration of power in his comprehensive work on economic and social organization (1947) is meticulously reasoned and carefully worded.[1] Weber defined power as (a) the ***probability*** that someone (b) ***in a social relationship*** will be (c) able to achieve his or her ***will or objectives***, whatever is desired, (d) despite ***resistance***, (e) regardless of the ***bases*** upon which this probability rests.

Having taught a liberal-arts course on 'power' at Cornell University for 20 years, considering the literature on this subject written over more than two millennia, from Plato, Aristotle and Machiavelli to Robert Dahl, C. Wright Mills and Michael Parenti, I have found Weber's treatment of power by far the most insightful and 'powerful.' No writing on the subject more concisely and precisely encompasses what most people understand by this concept across most cultures. Let us briefly consider each of these elements of power in turn.

a. *Probability*

The pivotal point in Weber's definition is his equating power with a *probability,* not something that can be unconditionally possessed. Statements about power refer to relationships in which someone can achieve (or may not achieve) what he or she wants or needs. The greater the *probability* of successfully and reliably getting what one wants, the greater is his or her power. Conversely, the lower the probability, the less is the power. Power is regarded as never a certainty, but rather something problematic. This reflects our real-world experience. Even very powerful persons sometimes cannot have or do what they want.

Statements about power describe the likelihood or expected frequency of an occurrence, when what will actually occur is not yet definitely known. With regard to power and the poor, the term refers to the probability or likelihood that someone will be able to accomplish, achieve, acquire, or maintain something that he or she wants, whether it is material or immaterial—food, shelter, wealth, or job security, respect, affection, peace of mind. The converse -- getting something that one does *not* want -- has never been considered as a manifestation of power. Indeed, it represents the opposite of power. So power is not simply causation; it refers to getting what someone wants.

Whether one actually gets what is desired can only be known *ex post*, when there is an accomplished fact to assess. Power is usually spoken of in binary terms: 1.0 = successful exercise of power, 0.0 = failure to exercise power. Before an outcome is known, the probability of success can be very high, even 0.9999; but there is always some possibility that what is desired will *not* be achieved, making the outcome less than fully certain, less than 1.0. There is always some chance, however small, that any effort to exercise 'power' will be unsuccessful as *even the very powerful do not always get exactly what they want*. Weber's appreciation of this fact helps us to keep our analyses and assessments realistic by taking account of the uncertainties of the real world, which is always probabilistic.

While power is commonly described in binary terms, stating that power exists or not -- and is possessed or is not -- it is more realistic to think and talk in terms of the *degrees of success* in getting what one wants. For example, 0.75 could represent a favorable compromise; 0.50 could represent getting half of what one wants; 0.10 could reflect a near-defeat that came with a face-saving concession. Alternatively, the evaluation continuum can be expanded by considering unwanted outcomes as having a *negative* value. A utter defeat would then have a score like –1.0 instead of 0.0, with zero as a kind of midpoint between success and failure in the exercise of power, representing an indeterminate outcome or mixed result. There are many ways of conceptualizing power, all with different implications for measuring it quantitatively.

Our starting point for thinking about power and empowerment, especially of the poor, should be to be clear about *what is real*. Of most relevance are the *outcomes* of power relationships: whether someone was able to achieve all or at least part of what was desired, or was unable to get what was desired, or indeed got what was actually *un*desired. It is also important to factor in the *costs* of achieving objectives, which is not done in much of the literature on power. Power should be assessed considering not only *success*, but also with regard to the *costs* of success, absolute or relative. Weber brought the consideration of costs into his analysis of power by stipulating the variable of 'resistance.'

Power is usually referred to as an absolute, reflecting whether an objective was achieved or not. The usual meaning of the term thus refers more to *effectiveness* than to *efficiency*. But the latter should also be considered. Unfortunately, considering *relative* power -- for example, how cost-effective is the attainment of a certain goal? -- makes any analysis more complicated. Is a person more powerful if only a *few* goals are sought but *all* are achieved, compared to seeking *many* goals and only achieving *some* of them? What if *more* goals are achieved in absolute terms in the latter instance than in the first, but they are *a smaller percentage* of what was sought? What if those few goals are achieved *very cheaply* in terms of the resources expended to attain them? How does this compare with achieving many goals at a high cost, either in terms of total cost or in cost per goal attained? Any effort at quantification of power quickly becomes arguable, given the subjectivity involved in choosing between absolute and relative manifestations of power. Such considerations make the measurement of power a morasse, and this is why we find so few measurements attempted.

Considering the costs of getting others to comply with one's wishes leads one to think about factors like *reputation*. We know that *a reputation for power* enables certain persons to achieve their goals with little or no expenditure of effort or resources. Usually getting more results while

spending less is seen as a manifestation of greater power. But reputation-based power, if it is not backed by effective resources to enforce others' compliance, can collapse quickly (see section on the costs of power, below). Is power that rests purely or mostly on psychological factors as real and as effective as that which rests on more material bases? And how do we assess power that may be great in one time period, but then evanescent in subsequent periods? This adds still more complexity to efforts for evaluation.

'Power' refers in most people's implicit lexicons to *ex ante* probabilities – the likelihood that a person can and will achieve whatever he or she wants. For poor people, these wants typically include food security, stable income, shelter, clothing, health care, schooling for children, protection by the authorities against victimization, equitable enforcement of laws, respect—those desires expressed most often in the World Bank's *Voices of the Poor* series (Narayan, Patel, et al. 2000; Narayan, Chambers, et al. 2000). Such probabilities are not themselves something real; they are only estimations based on an analytical construct. But they are associated with *very real consequences*: food security, personal safety, effective influence on public policy, etc.; and they certainly have *real causes*: literacy, job security, legal rights, etc.

What is real and determining is the complex of factors, generally highly interactive and contingent, that *produce desired outcomes*. These factors, processes, and outcomes are all real -- but none of them is, literally, power. Power is an emergent property, the consequence of a multitude of relationships—material, psychological, cultural, legal, and so forth – and it is probabilistic, not mechanistically determined, except perhaps in a crude minority of instances. The most pervasive power is often that which is tacit and implicit, not evident from overt manifestations of 'power,' from the exercise of coercion or authority or economic manipulation.

b. Stable Relationships

Weber restricted power to *social* relationships, i.e., to associations which are *ongoing and continuous*, not irregular or random occurrences. This may seem too restrictive as a definition. But for our purposes, being concerned with empowerment of the poor, it is an important and acceptable qualification. We are interested not in what may happen once in a lifetime or unpredictably, but rather in *what affects the outcomes of daily existence and lifetime conditions*. Thus, power should be understood and assessed in terms of stable relationships, although these can be changing in favor of the more or the less empowered.

c. Intentionality

The crux of Weber's definition and of most understandings of power is the achievement of *desired objectives,* the satisfaction of particular needs or wants. Recent work on poverty and its reduction has focused appropriately on what poor people themselves think, need, and want (Narayan, Patel, et al. 2000; Narayan, Chambers, et al. 2000). Weber's linking power to the ability to achieve what is desired and intended means that getting what one does *not* want is not considered a manifestation of power, even if there was some causal connection.

As noted above, power is something different from causation in general, with some element of volition inherent in its exercise or manifestation. 'Empowerment of the poor' differs from 'basic

needs' analyses and policies because it has some intrinsic, unavoidable subjective dimensions, not assuming that outsiders can decide for poor people by some 'objective' criteria what they need.

But if power is linked with people's own objectives and valuations, it is necessarily then a *hybrid* of objective and subjective phenomena. If a person has few wants but achieves them all, he or she is not only satisfied, but also powerful according to his or her expectations (if not by others' evaluations). Conversely, a person who has many wants but can satisfy only a few of them is not very powerful by his or her own assessment. Power is about one's reach as well as one's grasp.

Some might object that this makes power too relative, too subjective. Are not persons who get more desired outcomes, even if they don't get everything they want, more powerful than persons who get only a few desired things, whether their aspirations are great or modest? This is a fair question. But such comparisons are more appropriate for assessing the satisfaction of basic needs than for evaluating people's empowerment. If we want to make purely objective statements, we should stick to summative assessments of some predetermined set of needs, bypassing the ambiguities of the term *power*. In fact, *empowerment* involves more than satisfying needs. It is connected to people's wants and desires, things that affect their dignity, satisfaction, and personal fulfillment. Thus, the number of goods and services received is not a measure of empowerment.

d. Costs of Power

The qualification that Weber introduces concerning *resistance* is important because achieving goals *without cost* or *without effort* is hardly a manifestation of power. Breathing air and getting up in the morning are not matters of power or empowerment (unless one is being physically or otherwise constrained from doing so). Free goods, available to everyone, are outside the realm of *power*. Weber's including resistance within the definition of power takes account of whatever opposition there may be to people's getting what they want. This is particularly relevant when thinking about empowerment of the poor.

This relates also to the complicated matter of rights. Having rights that are recognized and fulfilled, such as the right to health care or to free speech and free association, is certainly within the domain of empowerment. If these rights are granted without any exertion by the persons who then enjoy them, they are still surely an aspect of empowerment. Rights might appear to be free goods, but they are not. Their achievement and maintenance invariably involves costs, past if not present, and they commonly require some expenditure for their protection. So rights are also appropriately regarded within a Weberian framework. Resistance of some sort is invariably associated with any established right, to create it and/or to maintain it.

Resistance is relevant whenever thinking about empowerment because it is always useful to ask *who or what* stands in the way of people, particularly poor people, achieving what they want? Weber's definition of power points out that we should think about sources and amounts of resistance as part of any power assessment. Reducing resistance or sources of resistance that keep poor people from achieving what they need and want is one element in empowerment.

e. Power Resources

The last clause in Weber's definition, referring to the *bases* for having a higher probability of getting compliance with one's wishes (despite resistance) gives the concept its firmest ontological grounding. It directs our attention to the actual factors that enhance (or diminish) a person's or group's chances of achieving his, her or their desired goals. These *power bases* are also referred to as *power resources* or *power assets*, or in still other terms. A lifetime as an applied social scientist working on development has confirmed a framework for understanding power bases that I learned from my thesis advisor at UC Berkeley, Warren Ilchman. He proposed six general categories of power resources, as discussed below.

II. A Typology of Power Resources

Weber's analysis has prompted Ilchman and myself to review the social science literature on power, seeking to identify and understand what are the various *kinds* of power bases that have been proposed by political scientists, sociologists, and economists over the years (Ilchman and Uphoff 1969; Uphoff 1989). These bases can be summarized in terms of six categories of resources or assets which can be accumulated and utilized to achieve objectives. These are analogous to the categories of *land, labor, and capital* in economic analysis and can be considered as 'the factors of production' in political economy. The types of resources that enable people to achieve their needs and wants through economic, social and political processes are:

- *Economic resources* (power bases or assets) stem from control over *land, labor and/or capital* as well as over the *goods and services* that are produced therefrom. This category includes both accumulated wealth and assets as well as the income streams that derive from them when they are used to achieve objectives. The benefits from control over economic resources include not just economic forms of production and consumption but also other goods or services, such as influence on public policies, access to higher education, or housing in a more prestigious and safe neighborhood. Wealth and the economic means that go with it have long been known as a source of power, but this is not the only source.

- *Social resources*, that is, *social status* or deference derived from (a) occupying certain respected *social roles*, or (b) belonging to respected *social groupings or categories*, and/or (c) meeting *socially-valued criteria*. Having certain personal attributes, belonging to certain groups or categories, or inheriting deferred-to status clearly can affect one's ability to achieve one's goals. These 'goods' can be consumed for personal satisfaction, producing the 'services' of respect, esteem, and deference; or they can be drawn upon to achieve objectives beyond self-satisfaction, becoming power bases (assets) that affect outcomes such as receiving public services, getting good employment, or having respect from law enforcement officers and other officials. The social realm is also a source of power.

- *Political resources*. These are primarily a consequence of the incumbency of *authority roles* that entitle people to claim that they are speaking in the name of the state and can employ or dispose of whatever resources state institutions possess to enforce their decisions.[2] Being able to *influence* the exercise of authority and to achieve objectives

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thereby, by voting or any other means, creates power within the realm of politics. This can be used to affect multiple domains of economic and social life, with outcomes such as health care, employment, and educational opportunity.

- *Informational resources*. *Knowledge* can be productive and beneficial in its own right; but knowledge that is productive or beneficial for others can be more important as a power resource. Such knowledge will be desired by others, giving rise to the adage "knowledge is power." The power that comes from possession of knowledge is governed by dynamics of supply and demand, and is therefore relative rather than absolute, but information is an element in power equations and outcomes even if not always effective by itself.

- *Moral resources*, meaning the *legitimacy* accorded to decision makers, their roles, the decisions they make, and/or the system of governance that leads people to defer to and accept others' decisions as right and proper. Legitimacy can be accorded to certain non-state actors, such as a Gandhi or a Martin Luther King, as well as to *office holders*. The latter will always claim legitimacy for themselves and for their decisions, although not everyone will accept this claim. Like status and information, legitimacy is a 'soft' resource, conferring power based upon highly subjective factors. However, it is important for empowerment because it can have very real consequences in terms of getting others' compliance with decisions.

- *Physical resources*. These create the physical *force* that people may be willing and able to exert against others to compel their cooperation or compliance. Often, people equate physical force with 'real power,' because it is more able to overcome resistance than other means; however, overall it is better understood as one of the six main categories of assets that can be used to achieve one's goals. Force is referred to as 'coercion' if it is used with a claim of legitimacy; or as 'violence' if the use of force is not accepted as legitimate.[3]

There is no need to go into more detail on these power bases. They offer an inclusive framework for dealing with economic, social, and political relationships in a supra-disciplinary way.[4] For understanding empowerment, they help to organize and make more concrete the basic factors in economic, social, and political life that determine people's ability to get what they desire. They can be regarded, literally, as the factors of power production, or as the meta-factors .

III. Developing an Analytical Understanding of Power

With Weber's encompassing conceptualization of *power*, we can construct an analytical appreciation of *empowerment* by distinguishing three sets of phenomena, or five if we subdivide the middle set. The discussion here focuses as much as possible on real, denominatable, observable and, to the extent possible, measureable things so that the terms 'power' and 'empowerment' become less abstract and more tangible:

- *power **resources***—assets that can be accumulated, invested, expended, transacted, and exchanged, creating potentials and possibilities for achieving objectives;

- *power **capabilities, processes and contexts*** – that channel, magnify, nullify, reinforce, deter, cumulate, etc. activities and beliefs which shape outcomes, and

- *power **results***—whatever is achieved by the use of these resources or assets.

Note that none of these is power itself. They are, respectively, the **sources** of power, the **operation** of power, and the **fruits** of power. Power itself remains different from these means and ends. The 'inputs' and the 'outputs' of power are the most tangible and concrete, but there are a number of elements or steps in between that are part of the creation and exercise of power -- notably capabilities, processes, and contexts, which can be considered as 'throughputs' of power.

Capabilities

The possession of power resources in itself confers only limited or incomplete power. While these resources increase the probability that a person will be able to achieve certain objectives, and having more of these resources is better than having less, actual results depend upon *the skill and effectiveness with which resources are acquired, accumulated, used, wielded, exchanged, or withheld*. Being endowed with resources is only one part of empowerment, necessary but not sufficient. Capabilities such as *skill and confidence* enable a person to use available endowments more effectively, and thus they *add to one's power* by raising the probability that desired outcomes will be achieved. They are like coefficients which are to be multiplied times the value of the resource base; zero capability nullifies any resource endowment. On the other hand, if the resources are zero, the greatest capability in the world will not create power (probability of achieving what is needed or wanted).

Power capabilities can be *either individual or collective*. Personal elements such as confidence and experience complement tactical and strategic skills. *For empowerment of the poor, group capabilities are particularly important*, since organization, by aggregating and pooling people's assets, can enhance the results attainable from any given individual's or group's endowment. This potential becomes more important for poor people because *their respective individual resource endowments are so meager*. Individually, they can exercise relatively little power by expending or withholding their own personal resources.[5] Active and effective efforts are needed if desired benefits are to flow from utilizing resources available to them. Power capabilities are thus also a critical element of empowerment.[6] People with similar resource endowments achieve quite different results in life, depending on how well they utilize their assets.

Processes

Less delimitable than resources and capabilities -- although no less real -- are the processes whereby resources (power inputs) are converted -- through capabilities (management skills and organizational capacities) -- into results (power outputs). This conversion does not occur in abstract relationships but actually through structured circumstances that involve roles, rules, rights, precedents, procedures, access, and so on.

For example, when elections are determined by a majority or plurality vote, rather than by proportional representation, the votes of poor people will have less weight so long as they are a minority or constitute a majority that is fractured by ethnic or other differences. Similarly, when the poor lack access to a country's mass media, they will have difficulty directing attention to their plight and claims. The voices of poor people will have more influence on policies and

resource allocations if a country's mass media are open to communicating their situation and demands. Thus, a variety of process factors affect the ability of poor sectors to advance their interests, positively or negatively. These are distinguishable from people's resource endowments and their capabilities.

Context

The processes and transactions that affect poor people's power occur within larger contexts of cultural, social, economic, and political factors. These contextual factors include norms, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and so on, that influence whether the economic, social and political processes that affect the lives of the poor function in benign or malign ways. They also affect the resource endowments and capabilities of the poor, such as by encouraging or discouraging the aspirations of the poor to improve their lives, a capability factor suggested by the work of Appadurai (2004).

Contexts cannot be measured in any direct or simple way because they are made up of many factors, often countervailing. *Ceteris paribus* assessments can be made of specific contextual factors. But what is important is whether *the net effect of context and process factors* is to establish and maintain an environment that is enabling or disabling for the poor, given their resources and capabilities.

The four domains that constitute the main factors in the 'equation' for empowerment of the poor are shown in Table 1 below. Direct focuses for policies and programs are the *initial and changing conditions* of the poor, which provide the means for achieving their needs and wants at individual or household levels. Indirect focuses are the *initial and changing opportunity structures* for the poor, various enabling or disabling conditions that operate at institutional or societal levels.

Table 1: Analytical Framework for Promoting and Assessing Empowerment of the Poor

Direct focuses		Indirect focuses	
Assets	**Capabilities**	**Processes**	**Context**
Individual/household levels		**Institutional/societal levels**	
Power resources:	*Individual traits:*	*Institutions, roles:*	*Norms, values, etc.:*
Economic	Personal skills	*Democratic institutions and processes*, e.g. election of representatives by majority rather than proportional representation	*Power distribution* among nonpoor actors (sources of resistance)
Social	Interpersonal skills		
Political	Experience		*Cultural barriers*, e.g. patriarchy, discrimination
Informational	Confidence	*Established rights,* e.g. free speech	*Capability of state institutions*, e.g. effectiveness
Moral	Aspiration	*Access* to media	
Physical	Energy/persistence	*Fairness* of legal system, police, and courts	*Social structure,* e.g. mobility, segmentation of the poor
		Permeability of decision processes to claims of poor actors, a result of the above factors plus *context*	*Social norms* of participation, equity, etc.
Group/collective levels			
Power resources:	*Organizational capabilities:*		
Economic	For collective action, including self-help		
Social			
Political	*Shared skills:*		
Informational	Experience, confidence, aspiration, etc.		
Moral			
Physical			

Some Implications of This Analysis

Power resources are conventionally measured, aggregated, and compared, across individuals or groups and over time, in most quantitative treatments of power. Some of these assets are amenable to cardinal measurement, e.g., economic resources, voting power, years of education as a proxy for information or access thereto, or force of numbers. However, others lend themselves only to ordinal measurement, notably status, legitimacy, and positions of authority. Some measurement of these bases for achieving changes in the status and conditions of the poor is feasible, although aggregating these measures into a single number that reflects individual or collective capability to achieve certain objectives across any and all environments, and for any and all purposes, remains beyond current methodological knowledge.

Unfortunately, capabilities, processes, and context factors present much more complex problems of measurement than assessing power resources. Case studies where many factors are similar but there are identifiable differences in capabilities, process, or context can be written up and assessed comparatively. Alternatively, where changes are introduced in capabilities, process, or context, and the impact of these changes on poor people's ability to achieve what they need and want can be tracked, researchers can infer causal relationships to offer some guidance for policy and institutional interventions. With the framework laid out Table 1, *ceteris paribus* conclusions can be drawn about empowerment that take explicit account of contextual or process differences, and that identify ways in which processes and contexts can be changed to favor the empowerment of the poor.

Attempts to measure power dynamics will always confront the fact that people's efforts to achieve their objectives are subject to both structural and stochastic influences. These include:

- *systemic biases* that constrain or favor success in power exercises, as well as

- *random and chance factors* that will be unpredictably encountered in such efforts.

The first set of factors can be analyzed and evaluated with some objectivity and confidence, although these are complex enough that conclusions will be more inferential than causal. Random and chance factors are inherent in both processes and contexts, and they will invariably color and confound efforts to assess structural effects. These further attenuate our ability to make firm predictions or prescriptions. But they need to be kept in mind.

Simple causal models of power processes will always contain large margins of error. Rather than gloss over this, we need to try to factor these uncertainties into our analysis and measurement. Likewise, we should avoid attributing deterministic causation to processes and outcomes that remain always subject to chance influences and deliberate actions of individuals and groups, either enhancing or diminishing the empowerment of the poor.

Implications for Promotion

This analytical understanding of power produces some suggestions for how each of these domains could be altered or enhanced to promote greater empowerment of the poor. This

framework also suggests some measurement strategies to build an effective knowledge base to guide actions on behalf of the poor. These are listed in Table 2.

This analysis, by focusing attention on assets, capabilities, processes and context in turn, implies points of intervention and certain strategies to increase the empowerment of the poor. The most fundamental is to increase the power resource endowments of the poor. Since these resources are quite varied, however, the steps to do this would also vary. For impact and sustainability, the steps should be made mutually reinforcing.

Table 2: Opportunities for Promoting and Measuring the Empowerment of the Poor

Interventions for promotion			
Assets	**Capabilities**	**Processes**	**Context**
Investments and policies to increase the power resource endowments of poor persons and households	*Training* for poor persons *Catalytic efforts* to strengthen or establish organization among the poor	*Policy reforms* *Institutional changes* and reforms	Actions to reinforce *positive influences* that enhance the power of poor actors; Actions to counter *negative influences* that diminish the power of poor actors
Focuses for measurement			
Assets	**Capabilities**	**Processes**	**Context**
Tools for measuring the various power resources of the poor *Comparative studies of the effects of* ceteris paribus *changes* made in the power resource endowments of the poor, on their ability to achieve their objectives	*Evaluations of training strategies and methods* for empowering the poor *Evaluations of methods for enhancing organizational capacities* of the poor *Comparative studies of the effects of changes* in organizational and personal capacities of the poor on empowerment	*Case studies* with appropriate quantification of how certain policies or institutions—and changes in these—can affect the empowerment of the poor, including effects of assets, capabilities, and processes.	*Case studies* to assess how significant are various contextual factors that affect the power of the poor, and what effects certain changes in these contextual factors have on assets, capabilities, and processes

Capability enhancement should focus on both individuals and groups, with various sorts of participatory training provided to build up psychological strengths as well as personal skills. There is some knowledge about how to create or strengthen organizational capacity among the poor, with evidence that this can create sustainable abilities of large numbers of poor people to achieve their most urgent needs.[7] However, too often such efforts are undertaken in a "blueprint" manner or in directed ways that do not create genuine empowerment or effectiveness.[8] There are many examples of large-scale initiatives that establish local capabilities for resource mobilization and management, in the process increasing the abilities of the poor to improve their conditions.[9] In an Annex to this paper, I present a short case study of how such a process of farmer empowerment was undertaken and how it succeeded in Sri Lanka, with high economic payoff for the farmers and government but also good evidence of sustainability.

Considerations for Community and Local Empowerment

While one can think of "empowering communities and localities" as a distinct process, our specific concern is how the empowerment of individuals and households classified as poor can be enhanced *at community and other local levels.* Thus, we are not talking about empowering communities and localities as such. While this may be desirable in the context of decentralization initiatives, it would require that we specify what communities or localities want, a difficult assignment. With our focus on poverty reduction, the unit of analysis and action is the individual or household, although this does not mean that we are concerned only with this level.

Different Levels of Empowerment

Some strategies for empowering the poor focus on individuals and households directly, while other strategies with the same objective have a broader scope, with different, larger units of analysis and action. It can be argued that efforts to empower the poor that *only* consider individuals or households as separate units of analysis and action will miss opportunities to benefit the poor, because collective action is not part of the strategy, and will also have less sustainability because there is no reinforcement of the efforts made by individuals and households.

Given our concern with the poor and poverty reduction, the question is how changes in resource endowments and capabilities aggregated at the community or some other local level can enhance the power of the poor. If one attempts to empower the poor only within a household context, or only by enhancing individual endowments and capabilities, opportunities are forgone, including some relatively low-cost and potentially very cost-effective ones.

Much poverty reduction is a result of individuals' or households' efforts, made in response to prevailing situations, utilizing their respective endowments and capabilities. But this represents a kind of "privatization" of poverty reduction. Many of the things needed to meet the needs and wants of the poor require **collective action**, for example:

- establishing and maintaining a clean village water supply;

- banding together to purchase raw materials in bulk at lower price for making handicrafts,

and then marketing as a group to gain access to more favorable markets and to reduce the time that must be spent when selling products individually;

- improving local sanitation to reduce diarrheal and other diseases that are unnecessarily endemic among the poor (improving hygiene can be a more individual effort);

- deterring police, moneylenders, and other local power figures from victimizing petty vendors, day laborers, unmarried women, lower castes, and other vulnerable groups.

Many of the constraints, injustices, and indignities identified as particular burdens in *Voices of the Poor* require not just individual or public-sector action but actions by the poor themselves. Empowerment of the poor thus can be promoted through some combination of (a) *direct enhancement of poor people's respective assets and capabilities* so that they have a higher probability of achieving what they need and desire through their own efforts—a 'private' approach to empowerment of the poor; and (b) *establishing assets and capabilities at higher levels of decision-making and activity* that lead to the same or similar outcomes, thereby enhancing the abilities of the poor to get what they need and want.

The latter is a collective strategy of empowerment, important because the first can **never be sufficient** to meet all of the needs and wants of the poor. Also, the second approach is often needed to **protect gains** made through the first approach. In either case, agencies should seek to enable poor people to have more effect and impact from *whatever assets and capabilities they have*, individually and collectively, by making the environment of the poor, both processes and contexts, more enabling than disabling.

Roles and Functions

For people to become organized and act collectively, they need to have a variety of recognized *roles,* formal or informal. They also need supporting *rules, precedents, and procedures* that will enable them to perform four basic functions that are essential for any organization and collective action:

- decision making

- resource mobilization and management

- communication and coordination

- conflict resolution (Uphoff 1986a).

Collective action of any sort, whether through legally established local government bodies, through formally constituted organizations such as cooperatives, or through informal sets of actors who have ongoing social relationships and common purposes, will require performance of these four functions.[10]

To build up capacities of the poor to utilize their limited resources more effectively to achieve goals and benefits on their own behalf, one of the basic strategies for empowerment that goes beyond individual and household units and aims will be either:

- *strengthening* such roles, rules, precedents, and procedures where they already exist, or

- *establishing* these where they do not.

Organizing the poor to advance their interests and meet their needs requires more than the creation or existence of some formal organization. Agreement on common purposes and on how the costs and benefits of collective action will be shared is important in a constitutional sense (Ostrom 1990). But the capacity for achieving specific purposes, despite resistance, depends on actual performance of these several functions. The activities associated with these four functions enable people to accomplish more with their resources than they could when operating as separate individuals or households.

Levels of Collective Action

There are a number of levels of decision-making and activity beyond the individual and household levels. Several of these are commonly grouped under the rubric "local" (see analysis of this usage in the context of local institutional development, in Uphoff 1986b). There are three such levels at which collective action is more feasible -- and for the poor, desirable: the group, the community, and the locality.

At the **group** level, people associate according to *common characteristics and interests* in order to promote shared interests, for example as farmers or fishermen, women or men, youths, members of an ethnic or religious group, speakers of a common language, etc. These associations are usually fairly small, but they can be joined or federated up to higher levels of operation and can become quite large. The group level remains the foundation of larger-scale organization unless the organization is a mass one, without small-group base units.

The **community** level is determined by people's *place of residence*, so that neighbors living in some proximity cooperate to protect and advance shared interests, defined basically by their living close together. This level is more heterogeneous than the group level, although bonds of kinship can give greater strength to the association among community members.

The **locality** level represents *a set of communities* that have ongoing patterns of interaction and cooperation. This may be framed by their proximity, common-pool natural resources, exchange of labor, a central market, shared religion or ethnicity, or other interests. Residents within a locality may attend the same weekly market, or the same schools, church, mosque, or temple. Interaction may spur some competition within the locality, but generally there is a degree of common identity and social solidarity that is absent or attenuated at higher administrative levels of organization, such as at the district or subdistrict level.

For empowering the poor, the first level of collective action -- the group level -- has many advantages because it is more homogeneous, based on members having self-identified, shared characteristics. This could be the poverty they have in common, or a condition that contributes to their poverty, for example, having a livelihood such as artisanal fishing, trash collection, or shoe repair. Groups formed on this basis are commonly thought of as mutual self-help groups. The homogeneous make-up of such groups offers the poor some advantages, but can also constitute a weakness, since all members will be relatively poorly endowed with resources.

An interesting question is whether it is possible to enlist or establish organizations at the community and locality levels that will serve effectively to reduce poverty and enhance the power of the poor. If the poor constitute a majority at these levels, any inclusive organization should be oriented toward meeting their needs. Resources of richer persons can possibly be co-opted to improve the situation of more poorly-endowed persons. However, there is a long history of heterogeneous organizations serving the interests of their richer members even when their poorer members are most numerous. Contextual factors such as an ethos of egalitarianism (e.g., religiously based) versus an acceptance of inequality have an effect on the operation of local organizations that are heterogeneous in membership.

It is also important to ask whether community and locality organizations can be designed or given incentives so that they make net contributions to empowerment of the poor, even if they are not totally devoted to this purpose. If so, resources besides those of the poor will be mobilized to improve their livelihoods and help attain the needs and wants of poor people. This may not always be feasible, but as an empowerment strategy, it deserves consideration.

How can the poor persuade community and locality organizations to take seriously the problems created by poverty and to redress these imbalances through their decision making, resource mobilization, communication, and conflict resolution? Allies from higher levels, whether units of government or external institutions such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), can help encourage such efforts; but they cannot dictate the internal dynamics of community or locality organizations (Ostrom 1990).

In some cases the poor may represent an important (swing) voting block, so that organizational leadership from the richer majority will need to attend to problems of poorer members. However, if voting power does not count for much in the particular context, the poor can be easily ignored. While ballots can be a source of empowerment, this is only true if electoral processes confer a real share of authority. The most reliable means to give the poor some leverage, even if they are a minority, is to have activities where the better-off benefit from the participation of the poor, or incur some costs from their non-participation.

A concrete case of such interdependence is management of the hill irrigation systems in Nepal studied by Martin and Yoder (1987). They examined the conditions under which tail-enders, invariably poorer than head-enders because the latter have more abundant and assured water supplies, had some influence on the decisions and operations of water user associations. Martin and Yoder found that the longer was the irrigation canal bringing water from a perennial or seasonal source, and the more labor was needed to maintain the canal and respond to emergency situations (threats of canal breach), the more equitable was the distribution of water within the canal's command area. Where canals were short and less labor was needed, head-enders could ignore or marginalize tail-enders with less cost to themselves.[11]

We are faced with an unfortunate tradeoff. Organizations of and for the poor that are smaller and more homogeneous can be more easily and more reliably used by the poor to advance their interests. However, these organizations will also have fewer economic, social, and political resources to wield. Larger organizations with a more robust and diversified asset base will be less amenable to influence or control by the poor, but they can potentially have more impact on

efforts that benefit the poor, such as creating infrastructure, improving public health, or influencing central decision-makers to invest more in rural development.

Organizational Leadership and Vulnerability

When thinking about local organizations to empower the poor, we are faced with what Michels (1915) called "the iron law of oligarchy." With good empirical evidence he asserted that the larger and more established an organization becomes, the more likely it is to be dominated by a minority, whether these leaders are richer members or the formerly poor now ascendant over their brethren. While strong leadership can make an organization more powerful and more effective, it also increases the likelihood that the organization will serve the interests of a leadership minority rather than those of the majority of rank-and-file members. Indeed, Michels showed that this tendency is stronger in organizations whose members are less well-endowed with power resources, that is, economically poorer and having less education and lower social status.[12]

Lipset and colleagues, in their classic trade union case study (1962), showed that leaders can in fact be kept accountable to members through internal electoral competition. But in this case, the union members (typographers) were somewhat better educated and more economically secure than most union members in America at the time. It is more than coincidence that the trade unions in the United States that have the most autocratic histories, such as longshoremen and teamsters, have also had memberships relatively lower in personal power assets of income, social status, and education.

Historically, the performance of organizations involved in rural development with poverty reduction as a goal has not been as dismal as Michels's analysis predicted. Takeover by the rich and domination of the poor in organizations is not inevitable (Esman and Uphoff 1984; Krishna, Uphoff, and Esman 1997). However, the "iron law" is not easily alloyed and remains a warning for everyone. The odds favor eventual oligarchic rule and an eclipse of internal democracy. Procedures and structures for internal democracy, accountability, and transparency are thus more important in organizations of, by, and for the poor than in organizations whose members are better endowed.

For example, 'vigilance committees' that oversee and balance executive leadership are increasingly appointed in Latin American organizations at the grassroots, to act as an institutionalized check on their elected officers. However, such measures should not hamstring or immobilize leadership, since initiative and even boldness are needed for effectiveness in seeking the interests of the poor. Building and maintaining consensus behind the purposes and strategies of an organization is compatible with (indeed a prerequisite for) strong leadership.

Solidarity is an important factor in enhancing the power of the poor because it allows all available resources to be concerted toward common objectives rather than being dissipated or negated by conflict. Leadership, of course, can play a key role in forging and maintaining solidarity, while division and factionalism is usually a reflection of competition between leadership elements.

It is often thought that social heterogeneity makes conflicts more likely, diminishing group power. However, Krishna (2002) found in his study of Indian villages in the state of Rajasthan that heterogeneous communities can achieve effective collective action, with "social entrepreneurs" who catalyze cooperation among subgroups having diverse characteristics. Conversely, in basically homogeneous communities, factionalism can be evoked by ambitious leadership mobilizing support on personal, familial, or other bases. Esman and Uphoff (1984) found that social heterogeneity or homogeneity was not a good predictor of the effectiveness of rural development through local organizations. Leadership factors and the contextual influences of values and ethos play a larger role than do socioeconomic characteristics per se.

The Role of Cognitive Factors

In analyzing organizational potentials and processes for benefiting the poor by enhancing their ability to achieve their needs and wants, it is easier to focus on relatively 'objective' factors -- roles, rules, precedents, and procedures. These can be observed and changed through decisions and actions, and thus are more amenable to intervention or purposeful construction. Moreover, they are very important for the poor themselves.

However, it would be a mistake to overlook the more subjective dimensions of organizational performance, loosely characterized as norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs. In my own experience of introducing local organizations for improving irrigation management, working with farmers considered to be among the poorest in Sri Lanka and Nepal, I found that one needs to look beyond *structural* elements of social organization to appreciate the effects of *cognitive* elements, even though these are harder to identify or affect (Uphoff 1996). An annex to this paper describes experiences that illustrate the analysis offered here.

This appreciation of cognitive factors, stemming from practical engagement in poverty reduction efforts, has informed my thinking about social capital (Uphoff 1999; Uphoff and Wijayaratna 2000; Krishna and Uphoff 2002). A distinction between cognitive and structural elements can be usefully integrated into all social science analysis, I believe, because it makes explicit the complementary sources of human activity that occur in groups of any scale: (a) incentives and patterns that arise from *individual* consciousness and intentions, and (b) second-order realities that are constructed from *shared* ideas and aspirations.

In social science, what are ostensibly *structural* factors, grounded in collectively validated and maintained patterns of thinking that affect people's evaluations and behaviors, are in fact basically *subjective*, that is, they are a matter of ideas, values, expectations, and beliefs. Their being shared gives them a degree of objectivity, stability, and measurability. While social structures are not physical like buildings or infrastructure, they become visible parts of social reality by virtue of widespread cognitive understanding and support.

Taking these factors into account represents an advance upon earlier concerns with "basic needs." It is not that such concerns were not worthy and beneficial, but they remained essentially paternalistic and did not address human needs and potential in their fullest sense. Meeting basic needs provides a foundation for improving the prospects of the poor, but we need to venture into less material and less tangible realms if efforts by the United Nations, World Bank and others are

to be mobilized for realizing the broader objectives of human development.

Most public policy actions in this area will have to be initiatives based on *ceteris paribus* logic, and none will be complete or perfect *a priori*. Thus, empowerment will have to be an iterative process, working in a 'learning process' mode, as advised by Korten (1980). Particular training, legislation, or community organization can be introduced with some degree of confidence, so long as incremental benefits for empowerment are assessed as experience accumulates and 'course corrections' are made as needed.

Beyond the effects of specific interventions, we should start building up knowledge of what combinations and sequences of action can be most effective, and cost-effective, for these purposes of empowerment for poverty reduction, social integration, and productive and decent work for all. Measurement advances will be helpful for evaluating such knowledge; however, very refined and detailed measurements are not needed to pursue this opportunity for advancing an applied social science that promotes successful poverty reduction through mobilization of the capabilities and aspirations of the poor themselves.

Annex: An Example of Large-Scale Empowerment, from the Bottom Up

How does all of this work in practice? There is no single formula or strategy for empowerment. The following example, however, shows how the framework developed in this paper can be applied to a particular case in which resources, capabilities, processes, and contexts were used to enhance empowerment, on a sustainable basis, for several tens of thousands of poor rural households, and eventually several hundred thousand poor households dependent on irrigation for their agricultural production in Sri Lanka.

The strategy in this case was not initially to increase the power resources of the poor but rather to enhance their ability to utilize land, water and other resources more productively through farmer organization. There was enhancement of resource endowments at the same time that changes were made in both processes and the context. The various changes introduced were positively reinforcing, with positive-sum results so that gainers greatly outnumbered any losers.

Initial resistance to the changes from engineers and richer farmers who had gained from the prevailing 'disorganized' situation was overcome because the new system was so evidently more productive and legitimate, increasing water productivity and agricultural production, and also reducing conflicts as farmer solidarity became established and appreciated from all sides. Opponents were co-opted as an effective cohort of leadership emerged from within the farming community (for detailed documentation, see Uphoff 1996).

The Project Setting

In 1980 the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) started implementing a water management improvement project in Sri Lanka, focused on the Left Bank of the Gal Oya irrigation scheme, the largest and most inefficient system in the country. The initial plan was to institute a more rigid management regime that would require farmers to follow schedules for channel maintenance and water distribution, both activities best described as chaotic at the time

of project inception. Examples of water theft and conflict over water were legion -- 80 percent of control structures were broken or inoperative in 1980 when the rehabilitation project began, and water was reliably measured and controlled at only seven locations in a 25,000 hectare area. These problems reflected the unpredictable and unresponsive main system management, which put water users in a vulnerable and deprived situation, eliciting conflict and uncooperative behavior.

The initial project design made no provision for water user associations, assuming that the imposition of 'discipline' from above would make best use of the scarce water supply. The lower third of the Left Bank never received water deliveries during the dry season; the middle third had only erratic and inadequate deliveries; even farmers in the top third experienced shortages at the end of long distribution (secondary) canals because head-enders hoarded available water. The formation of water user associations was added just before the project design was finalized so that water users could be mobilized (and required) to provide free labor for rehabilitating field channels (tertiary-level canals).

This decision looked at first like another imposition upon the poor. The average landholding size in Gal Oya Left Bank was about 1.7 acres, and the level of poverty was one reason why USAID decided to invest in improving the productivity of this system. As it turned out, because the project design made no provision for paying to have tertiary rehabilitation done, unless farmers cooperated in carrying out this rehabilitation work on a voluntary basis there would be few if any productive benefits from the government and USAID expenditures on primary- and secondary-level improvements in canal infrastructure. Water would still not reach the fields as intended, and there would not be resulting higher agricultural productivity.

The Intervention

The introduction of water user associations created, in a bottom-up way, roles among farmers for decision-making, resource mobilization and management, communication and coordination, and conflict resolution, the basic functions for any organization. Association members established their own rules, precedents, and procedures, since the project did not impose or even propose any 'blueprint' for how the associations were to operate. Farmers drew upon their indigenous norms and customs of voluntary group labor for community benefit, a tradition known as *shramadana,* to improve the run-down and often inoperative channels in their respective areas. Meanwhile, engineers and consultants rehabilitated the higher-level canals that delivered water to the field channels. Eventually, and faster than expected, a four-tier structure of farmer organization came into operation, coordinating farmer decisions with those of engineers, and vice versa, and also linking farmers to extension, credit, and other services needed. Most important, the organizations gave farmers much-needed channels to communicate and to resolve conflicts among themselves.

Ironically, by making engineers and project managers dependent upon farmers for the effective implementation of the project at the tertiary level, the project design 'empowered' water users. Engineers had to be more solicitous toward and cooperative with the farmer organizations, seeking their ideas and inputs to redesign the system, not just ordering them to carry out plans set from above, because the restoration and operation of field channels, to do the last and crucial task of allocating water among fields, had to be done on a voluntary basis.

Once more respectful relations were established with government technicians and officials, the farmers undertook impressive demonstrations of self-help. Young organizers (catalysts) began facilitating bottom-up, channel-based, informal organizations. Within six weeks, 90 percent of the farmers in a 2,000+ hectare pilot area were doing some combination of (a) channel cleaning -- some channels had not been maintained for 10, 15, or even 20 years, so were quite silted up, (b) distribution of water within channels, rotating deliveries so that head-, middle-, and tail-end farmers got equitable shares of whatever water was available in that water-short season,[13] and (c) saving of water, reducing offtakes upstream so as to be able to donate any excess water deliveries downstream to farmers who had greater need for them.

The engineers' attitudes toward farmers had previously been decidedly negative. Many of the settlers had not relocated to Gal Oya entirely voluntarily, some being designated by village headmen to move to Gal Oya, and others being former prisoners given early release to resettle there. Settlers were seen by outsiders (and saw themselves) as 'rejects' from the rest of society. However, once the engineers saw constructive, responsible behavior among farmers, including preventive maintenance to protect and improve irrigation infrastructure,, something not seen before, their attitudes and working relations with the farmers became more positive.

Once field channels were cleaned and water was being rotated and even saved, the irrigation system operated more efficiently, even before the planned main-system improvements had been completed. Water efficiency quickly doubled, so twice as much area could be irrigated as before. This gave positive economic benefits to farmers, particularly to the poorest among them, namely the tail-enders who had seldom received water for their dry-season crop before. Such successes reinforced cooperation among farmers at the same time that it enhanced their status in the eyes of engineers. The authority of farmer-representatives was only de facto, based on consensus among users to regulate tertiary-level operations. However, the representatives became part of more formal decision-making bodies at secondary and primary levels. Such grants of authority empowered farmers collectively in ways that had not been dreamed of only a year before.

The economic, social, and political resources of farmers were thus all enhanced, but so was their information. The farmer-organizers carried out training programs, and the system of farmer organization reaching from the field channel level up to the project level facilitated the flow of information both upward and downward where before there was an information vacuum. Social sanctions made the use of force obsolete,[14] and the whole effort acquired a legitimacy in the eyes of farmers, engineers, local officials, and politicians that was remarkable to observe.

Along with the increase in farmers' endowments of resources, there were enhancements of capabilities. The farmer-representatives, chosen by consensus and rotated according to farmers' wishes, quickly gained both experience and confidence, bolstered by formal training.

With this, we saw changes in a number of processes. Farmer-representatives now sat on the District Agricultural Committee presided over by the District Minister, and were able to speak directly to him. Engineers could deal with organized groups of farmers rather than with thousands of scattered individuals; they began meeting regularly (and in the field) with water users to identify problems and find solutions.

Farmers' explicit efforts to exclude partisan influences on water distribution (including requiring any farmer chosen as a representative to resign any party office held) meant that politicians could no longer play divide-and-control games. These and other changes meant that the operational context in which decisions were made and resources were allocated at higher levels was modified to be more open to farmer ideas and interests. What resources they had to draw on could be wielded more effectively.

Beyond this, the cultural and ideational context was affected in farmers' favor. Norms of participatory management were introduced; these were consistent with the espoused democratic ideology of the country, but had not been previously manifested because of long-standing feudal relationships and presumptions of bureaucratic and technocratic superiority. The ideals of equitable opportunities for livelihood, well established in the traditional culture and Buddhist religion, were publicly articulated, so that tail-enders could legitimately claim an equal share of water vis-à-vis head-enders. The visible and much-appreciated efforts of young women organizers legitimated an active role for women farmers in water management. Empowerment was thus a process that operated at the four different "levels" indicated in Tables 1 and 2.[15]

Results

The farmer organizations established in Gal Oya between 1981 and 1985 became a model for the whole country, with the Cabinet revising national policy in 1988 to introduce participatory irrigation management. Over 500,000 farmers today are members of participatory management systems throughout Sri Lanka, working with the Irrigation Management Department or the Mahaweli Economic Authority. Some of the organizations are less effective than those created in Gal Oya because less effort was invested in their formation and capacity-building, but such investments in "social capital" (Uphoff and Wijayaratna 2000) are justifiable in economic terms.

There is evidence that these creations have been sustainable as well as productive. In 1997, a dozen years after external assistance was withdrawn precipitously, the Left Bank farmer organizations were told that the Gal Oya reservoir's supply at the start of the dry season was too low to provide a full season of water issues. The farmers were advised that there would be no cultivation that year and that they should not waste their seeds and labor planting a crop.

Farmers were understandably upset about this situation, which would deprive them of income they needed for their families to survive through the year. One farmer did informal research and figured out that the engineers had forgotten to consider inflow to the reservoir during the dry season (even without additional rain, some water would flow into the reservoir from the water table in the watershed). The farmer organizations lobbied the Irrigation Department to allocate to them whatever water would be available and to let them utilize this quantity as best they could.

The Department calculated that it could give Left Bank farmers only 60,000 acre-feet of water, but it advised them: (a) to use this only on the upper 15,000 acres, not the full 65,000 acres of the Left Bank, applying the standard water duty of 4 feet/acre-foot; farmers were told this would use the scarce water most efficiently, avoiding seepage and conveyance losses; (b) not to grow rice, because this is a "thirsty" crop; and (c) not to blame the engineers if the crop failed, because they had been warned that planting was not feasible.

The farmer organizations after some discussion made a decision to share the available water equally, among head-, middle-, and tail-end reaches of the Left Bank, not wanting to favor one area over another. They decided that farmers could plant whatever crop they wanted to, but at their own risk. They were correct in assuming that there would be some additional water supply, as the Department was able to issue a total of 98,000 acre-feet during the season, with 38,000 acre-feet of inflow from the watershed and some rains during the dry season. But this was still not much more than one-third of the usually expected water duty: 1.5 feet per acre instead of the prescribed 4 feet.

What was the result? According to the records of the Departments of Irrigation and Agriculture, farmers planted rice on almost all 65,000 acres of the Left Bank, and they obtained average paddy yields of 85 to 95 bushels per acre, which matched or even exceeded their usual yields, despite the small amount of water provided. (It is now established that rice should not be grown as an aquatic plant, and that keeping the soil just moist, and well aerated, gives superior yields; see Uphoff 2003.) Farmers through their organizations were able to demonstrate superior technical capabilities in water management, raising their water-use efficiency several fold by careful allocation and distribution. An evaluation post-project had concluded that in normal years the farmer organizations at least doubled water-use efficiency, and quadrupled water productivity (Wijayaratna and Uphoff 1997).

Even more impressive, it should be noted that in the Left Bank, the upper and middle reaches of the command area are cultivated by Sinhalese farmers, mostly resettled into the scheme from all over the island during the 1950s, while the lower reaches are inhabited by Tamil farmers who moved their families there from coastal communities at about the same time. This means that the Sinhalese majority had agreed to share water equally with the Tamil downstream minority, at a time when armed conflict was going on elsewhere in the country between Sinhalese government forces and Tamil secessionists. Thus the empowerment of Gal Oya farmers was accompanied by an unprecedented level of inter-ethnic solidarity (Uphoff 2001).

Conclusions

The Gal Oya case study is reported, very summarily, to show that the concepts of empowerment discussed in the paper are operational and have ontological validity. While there are many more examples of failed efforts than of successful ones to introduce and institutionalize new relationships among poorer and marginalized populations in interaction with government, NGOs, or other outside organizations, experience shows that empowerment is possible and can be beneficial, not just for the poor but on regional and national bases. The farmer organization model developed in Gal Oya, started in 1981, was endorsed by the Cabinet in 1988 for introduction in all the major irrigation schemes in the country.

Measuring the effects of empowerment is easier than measuring empowerment itself. In the Gal Oya case, about $20 million worth of was grown in 1997 alone, when nothing would have been produced if engineers' rather than farmers' wishes and interests had prevailed. This amount was more than USAID's total project cost.

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Notes

[1] The best-known translation of Weber's writing from German into English (Weber 1947) includes only the first volume of Weber's monumental writings on social and economic organization. This contains Weber's analysis of power (*Macht*) as a factor in social and economic life, but not his analysis of 'authority' (*Herrschaft*), which is contained in a second volume. This was translated and published in English only many years later (in a translation by Roth and Wittich, *Economy and Society*, University of California Press, 1968). Weber's analysis of authority is thus not as well known among non-German social scientists as is his discussion of power.

[2] This accords with Weber's definition of the modern state. His definition of authority as "a special case of power" started me thinking about what would be the other, parallel kinds of power (Uphoff 1989).

[3] Weber definition of the modern state as an organization able to uphold a claim to a monopoly on the legitimate use of force is a very precise and important insight into the nature of political systems. Revolutionaries, who do not accept the state's claim that its authority is legitimate, will refer to the state's use of force as 'violence,' and to their own use of force as a legitimate exercise of coercive power (e.g., 'the people's coercive power') with the aim of achieving objectives that they consider right and proper.

[4] This was the conclusion of Kenneth Boulding when he reviewed the first presentation of this analytical framework (Ilchman and Uphoff 1969) in *The American Political Science Review* in June 1970. The book was republished by Transaction Books in 1998 as a social science classic.

[5] This idea was introduced into the social science literature by Michels (1915) when he declared: "Organization is the weapon of the weak in their struggle with the strong."

[6] This analytical (and practical) argument parallels the one that Krishna (2002) makes regarding the importance of "agency" for understanding and benefiting from "social capital."

[7] An annex to this paper discusses a case of such empowerment under difficult circumstances. The strategy and practices employed are documented and discussed by Uphoff (1996) and Uphoff and Wijayaratna (2000).

[8] An analysis of 150 rural local organizations showed that the average performance score for those initiated by government agencies was only 16, compared with 153 and 138 for those initiated by community member themselves or by local leaders. Fortunately, local organizations initiated in a 'catalyzing' manner by outside agencies, governmental or nongovernmental, had a respectable score of 114 (Esman and Uphoff 1984: 164).

[9] See the set of 18 cases presented by Krishna, Uphoff, and Esman (1997) and the analysis of how and why these cases succeeded (Uphoff, Esman, and Krishna 1998). The analysis and

suggestions in this chapter are grounded in personal involvement with as well as academic study of empowerment processes.

[10] Without subscribing to the 'structural-functional' school of sociology, one can acknowledge that these four functions correspond to those that Talcott Parsons (1951) ascribed to all social organizations: goal attainment, adaptation, integration, and pattern maintenance. The terms used here are less abstract than those of Parsons.

[11] This is consistent with Wade's analysis (1968) of Indian irrigation systems. Head-enders, as upstream water users, get first opportunity to withdraw water from the source; tail-enders are downstream and have to depend on what water remains flowing through the system. Wade found less collective action in larger command areas, but these were public sector systems in which an irrigation bureaucracy would ensure water at least to the head of a canal. Richer, more "powerful" head-end farmers could benefit from nonmaintenance of the canal and ensuing maldistribution of water. In Nepal, head-enders needed the cooperation and assistance of tail-enders to make sure that water from the source reached the command area. Interdependence thus conferred power on the poorer members.

[12] Michels, who wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century, did not reach this conclusion happily, having spent much of his life participating in or observing European socialist parties and trade unions. Unfortunately, he often gets bracketed as an "elitist" with Pareto and Mosca, contemporary social scientists who were more satisfied than Michels with their conclusions about the probability of elite domination.

[13] Project implementation started in a year when the reservoir was only 25 percent full. The reservoir normally was low (having filled only twice in the previous 30 years), but this was an unusually water-short season. Our program considered canceling the farmer organization effort because such scarcity would normally lead to a higher level of conflict, making the establishment of cooperation among farmers more difficult. In fact, the opposite dynamic prevailed: the crisis situation made farmers more willing to change behaviors and seek cooperative solutions.

[14] One farmer-representative at the start of the program's second year proudly told me: "We used to have murders over water; now we don't even have any conflicts." When I looked skeptical he defended his statement, saying that I could go inspect the local police station records to verify this if I doubted him.

[15] A much longer paper could be written about how this process worked. A similarly instructive paper could be written on another outstanding example, the Federation of Community Forestry Users (FECOFUN) formed in Nepal during the 1990s. Started from the bottom up, it has a membership today of 5 million, representing 60 percent of the rural population. As explained by Britt (2010), it was created despite (and maybe facilitated by) national political turmoil during that decade. Legal rights were conferred, altering the context for forest management, but there were also cultural redefinitions of concepts such as *hamro ban* (our forest) that legitimated

collective action, supported by professionals and some politicians in addition to millions of mostly poor rural people.

Local organizations put up some of their own economic resources, which were increased through better forest management, which in turn enhanced local power. The forest user groups became in many places para-local government bodies, compensating for weaknesses in the official institutional infrastructure. Legislation providing for decentralization, consistent with national policy directions, was important, but not a sufficient basis for local empowerment. External aid, as in the case of Gal Oya, was also important, but was actually not a very large amount. One could delineate in detail how changes in various resources, capabilities, processes, and context all contributed to creation of one of the most promising examples of empowerment for the poor that I know. The point here is that analytical and real factors in empowering poor people can mesh.