




“I Know It When I See It”:
Empowerment from the Perspective of
Development Organizations

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Presenter Disclosures


Mara Pillinger

(1) The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:


No relationships

Background

- Term “empowerment” lacks consistent definition
 - “I can’t define it, but I know it when I see it”
- Poses significant challenges for researchers and program directors (M & E, replication and funding)



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Research Questions


- Designed a study to examine what empowerment means to development organizations:

1. How do organizations conceptualize empowerment?
2. What is the role of organizations in promoting empowerment?
3. How do organizations operationalize empowerment?





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Methods

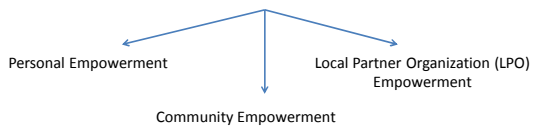


- Methodological quandary: qualitative research vs. global sample
- Solution: electronically-distributed self-completion questionnaire comprise of open-ended questions
- Questions asked: organization info, type of programs, definition & results of empowerment, measurement of empowerment, spiritual Empowerment
- Questionnaire distributed through development umbrella organizations to member organizations
- 48 responses, analyzed using Grounded Theory

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Conceptualizing Empowerment

- To be empowered: have the ability to make choices and changes
- Empowerment: process of transformation





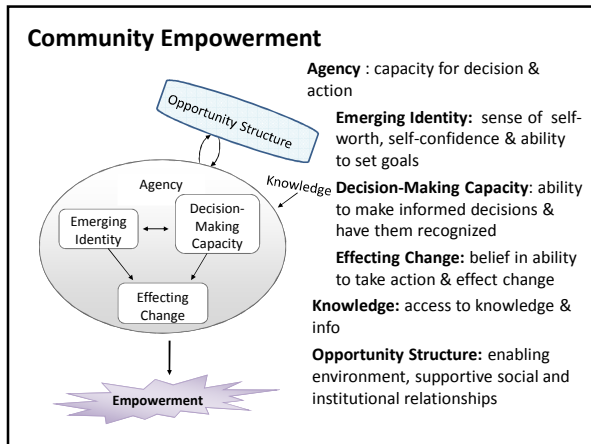
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graph TD; A[Community Empowerment] --> B[Personal Empowerment]; A --> C[Local Partner Organization (LPO) Empowerment];
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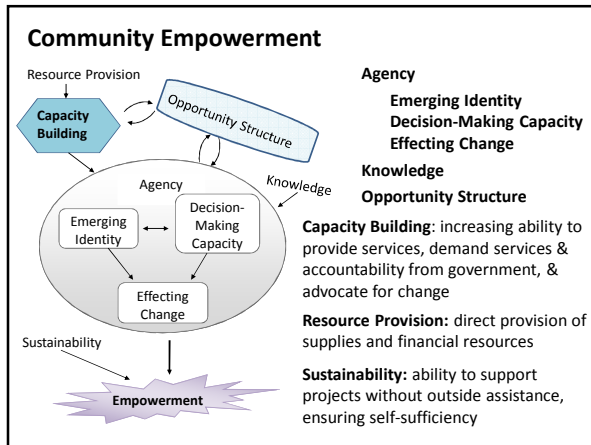
- Processes characterized by common set of ten mechanisms

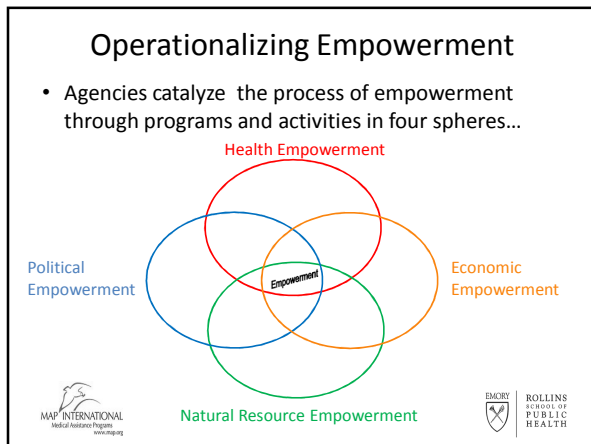


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Four Types of Empowerment

- **Natural Resource:** ability to access, share, conserve and effective use natural resources (e.g. food security, water management)
- **Economic:** ability to achieve financial security & self-sufficiency in order to meet needs and improve quality of life (e.g. market access, microfinance)
- **Political:** ability to access govt/social services, demand accountability, organize for self-government and advocacy (e.g. "town hall meeting" forums)
- **Health:** ability to make decisions regarding, seek and receive care; care is physically, financially and culturally accessible

Natural Resource Empowerment

"[Communities] were empowered to make decisions about resource allocation...through the involvement of traditional, municipal and community representatives...From their engagement in formal dialogue, concrete initiatives...related to farming and pastoral practice were agreed upon. . . proposals to current law were made to the national secretariat... [and] critical networking and relationship building [occurred] among groups that had formerly been in conflict."





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Political Empowerment

One program "provided an opportunity for community members to...communicate needs to district health officials...As a result, [officials] have committed to allocate new resources [toward community priorities], and civil society groups have been equipped with simple checklists to monitor the implementation of new policies."






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Health Empowerment

Programs “train community health workers [who] mobilize their neighbors to practice good hand-washing, careful control of drinking water, etc” to combat a cholera outbreak.



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Spheres of Empowerment Overlap...

Ex. Communities advocating for expanded health services

Health Empowerment

Political/Legal Empowerment

Economic Empowerment


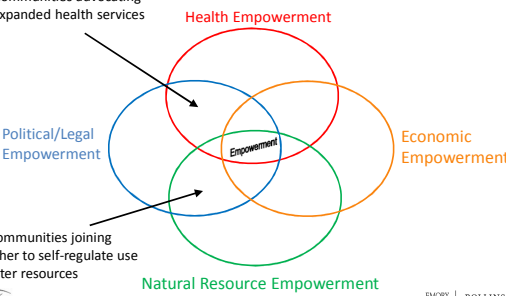
Natural Resource Empowerment

Empowerment

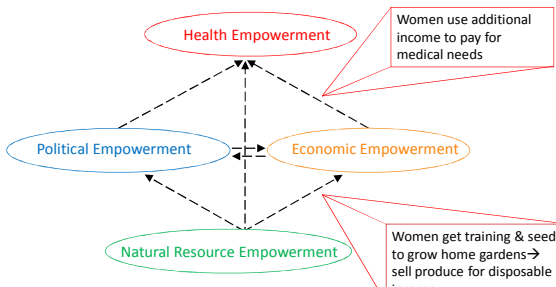
Ex. Communities joining together to self-regulate use of water resources

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...and Contribute to One Another



Health Empowerment

Political Empowerment

Economic Empowerment


Natural Resource Empowerment

Women use additional income to pay for medical needs

Women get training & seeds to grow home gardens → sell produce for disposable income

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Implications for Community-Based Planning & Services

- Community empowerment model offers a template for community-based programs
- Agencies can promote & facilitate mechanisms to enable communities to take leadership role in...
 - Priority setting, planning, and interacting with agencies
 - Advocating for access, accountability and services from government
 - Organizing for self-governance, resource allocation and provision of services
- Promoting community empowerment in one sphere can lead to empowerment in other spheres

Thank you

Questions?