Collaborative Research between MAP International & Emory University

Role of Organizations in Promoting Empowerment

Organizations cannot directly "empower" individuals, communities or LPOs. However, they are able to facilitate the processes through which empowerment may occur through their programs and activities.

Four Spheres of Empowerment

Natural Resource Empowerment: Accessing, effectively using and conserving land and resources. (e.g. farmers experimenting with new agricultural techniques, women growing home gardens, communities managing safe water sources)

Political/Legal Empowerment: Accessing government services and holding government accountable. (e.g. organizations directly lobbying national governments for policy changes, communities and LPOs lobbying local governments for increased access to services).

Economic Empowerment: Promoting financial self-sufficiency for LPOs, income generation and financial security for families. (e.g. LPOs improving fiscal management, women joining microcredit groups)

Health Empowerment: Increasing the availability and accessibility of care; enabling LPOs to improve, extend and sustain delivery of care. (e.g. medical clinics expanding and improving services, communities supporting local health teams, women independently accessing healthcare).

Multi-Dimensional Aspects

Organizations, particularly faith-based, acknowledged spiritual empowerment as a multi-dimensional aspect, underlying all four spheres, and is a catalyst for facilitating transformation and sustained social change.

Fig. 3: The Spheres of Empowerment Overlap...

Health Empowerment
Political/Legal Empowerment
Economic Empowerment
Empowerment
Natural Resource Empowerment

Fig. 4: ...and Build on One Another

Health Empowerment
Political/Legal Empowerment
Economic Empowerment
Natural Resource Empowerment

Spheres Overlap

The four spheres of empowerment overlap (Fig. 3) and build on one another (Fig. 4). For example, agricultural policy change that permits land ownership for women (Political/ Legal Empowerment), enables women to get a loan to begin/increase land cultivation (Natural Resource Empowerment), sell the produce to generate income (Economic Empowerment) and use the income to pay for medical care (Health Empowerment).
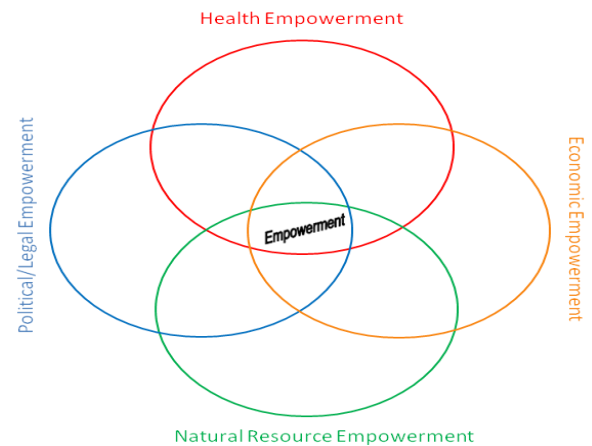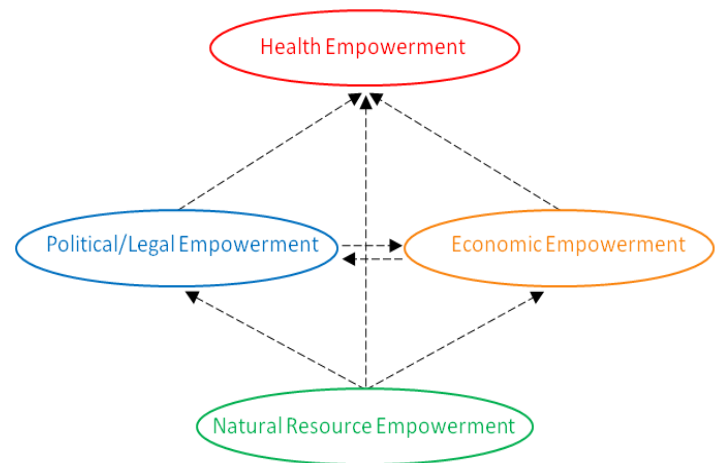
Outcomes of Empowerment

Organizations assert that the ultimate goal and outcome of empowerment is development. By empowering LPOs, promoting strong relationships among LPO, communities, and local governments, empowerment programs may also foster the growth of civil society.

For more information please contact: Ndunge Kiiti, MAP International, nkiiti@map.org or ph: 585-567-9635

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Conceptualizing Empowerment

Perspectives from Development Organizations

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Mara Pillinger & Monique Hennink (Emory), Ndunge Kiiti, W. Michael Smith & Ravi Jayakaran (MAP International)

Background and Objectives

"Empowerment' is widely-discussed in global health and development without a consistent or commonly accepted conceptualization of empowerment. This lack of definition may undermine the legitimacy of empowerment as a component of individual and community development and complicates its measurement and evaluation. Much previous research on empowerment is theoretical. This empirical study examines empowerment from the perspectives of development organizations and examines how they conceptualize and operationalize empowerment.

Research Methods

Qualitative data was collected from 48 non-government, faith-based, and private voluntary organizations. Organizations varied in geographic location, size and programmatic focus. Data were analyzed using Grounded Theory approach.
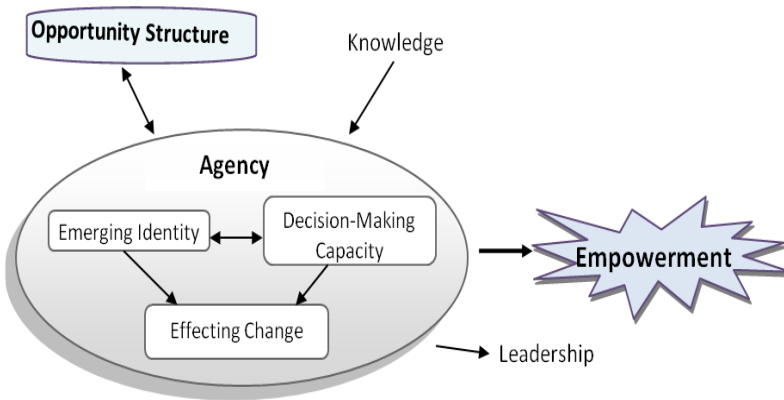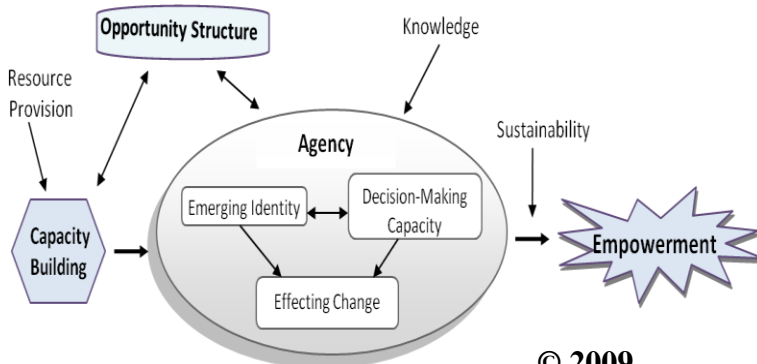
Fig. 1: Individual Empowerment Process

Fig. 2: Community & LPO Empowerment Process

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Study Results

Conceptualizing Empowerment

Overall 'empowerment' could be conceptualized as *the ability to make choices and make changes*.

Empowerment is conceptualized as a *process* of transformation that encompasses three distinct sub-processes:

Individual Empowerment (Fig. 1)

Community Empowerment (Fig. 2)

Empowerment of Local Partner Organizations (LPOs) (Fig 2).

These processes are characterized by common mechanisms:

Knowledge: access to education & information

Agency Triangle: links between emerging identity (sense of self-confidence, ability to set goals), decision-making capacity, and belief in one's ability to take action and effect change

Opportunity Structure: enabling environment, supportive social and institutional relationships

Leadership: individual initiative to play a role in effecting change on a broader scale

Capacity Building: increasing ability of community & local partner organizations to provide services, demand services & accountability from government and advocate for change

Resource Provision: direct provision of supplies and financial resources by respondent organizations

Sustainability: ability of community & local partner organizations to support projects without outside assistance, enduring self-sufficiency.