Empowerment Note 2

The definition and operationalisation of empowerment in different development agencies

Claire Scrutton and Cecilia Luttrell

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Introduction

This note provides details on the differing approaches to empowerment in a variety of donor agencies and NGOs, according to a selection made from official documentation associated with these agencies. The debates and concepts surrounding empowerment are discussed more fully in the paper on 'Understanding and Operationalising Empowerment' (Luttrell and Quiroz, 2007). 'Empowerment' is a term that has been embraced by a diverse range of institutions, from the World Bank to Oxfam to many more radical NGOs, but few of these share common definitions. Some organisations leave the term undefined (for example, UNDP, Oxfam and Save the Children). In others, different departments have their own interpretations, and there is no clear centralised definition.

The table below presents information from various policy documents from a wide spectrum of organisations, to present their attitudes to a number of different issues. These include:

1. **Process versus outcome:** Many organisations, such as SDC, CIDA, DFID and Oxfam, view empowerment as both an outcome and a process. Others (such as USAID and UNDP) take an instrumentalist view of empowerment and focus more narrowly on the importance of process and the assumption that participation alone will lead to empowerment. CARE International wbbnot only focuses on the importance of participating in the decision-making process, but also prioritises those processes that lead people to perceive themselves as both able and entitled to make decisions. This leads to an emphasis on the gaining of power and control over decisions and resources that determine the quality of one's life. This focus has also been adopted by many of the agencies to encourage an emphasis on participation in decision making (Save the Children, IFAD and the World Bank), ability to organise (Oxfam) and political participation (UNDP).

2. The **scope of empowerment** also varies. Empowerment is often associated with gender perspectives, and many organisations (such as Sida, CIDA and USAID) only use the term 'empowerment' within the remit of gender issues. For example, according to CIDA's (1999) gender policy, empowerment is central to achieving gender equality and helping women to become aware of unequal power relations, to gain control over their lives, and to acquire a greater voice to overcome inequality in their home, workplace and community. Others, such as DFID and SDC, are clear that empowerment is not only a gender issue but that it concerns a whole host of marginalised groups.

3. **Agency versus structure:** Many agencies, such as SDC, CIDA and CARE International, have adopted a focus on agency, whereas DFID (in particular) emphasises the importance of 'reforming political institutions' and structures.

4. **The role of outsiders in empowerment:** Oxfam (2005) and CONCERN promote self-help approaches to empowerment, with the belief that doing things for people where they could do them themselves could be harmful. Others (UNDP and USAID) have a different attitude; only outsiders can bring about empowerment. Changes must be made at government level and via civil society organisations; it is the role of external institutions to facilitate internal change processes.

Agency (and sources)	Definition/concept of empowerment	Empowerment programmes
SDC SDC, 1999 SDC, 2002 SDC, 2004 SDC, 2005a SDC, 2005b SDC, 2006	Empowerment represents both a goal and a method for SDC. It is stated to be a process of emancipation in which the disadvantaged are empowered to exercise their rights, to obtain access to resources and to participate actively in the process of shaping society and making decisions. The activities of SDC are designed to strengthen the poor in bolstering their self-esteem, identity, self-confidence and ability to analyse problems and develop potential solutions of their own (SDC, 2004). Older SDC documents have slightly different descriptions, but this illustrates the way that SDC regularly questions its definitions and updates them accordingly. SDC acknowledges that its recipients use their own definitions of empowerment.	Gender, health, education, governance, human rights, ICT and sport for development
DFID DFID, 1997 DFID, 2000a DFID, 2000b DFID, 2001 DFID, 2005	**Similarities with SDC** • States that empowerment is an aim of DFID programmes • Discusses different levels of empowerment (individual and collective) but not national or global • States that empowerment is both a process and an objective • Does not define power • Underlines psychological, social, economic and political empowerment types as important aspects of empowerment; there is no specific focus on legal, youth or women's empowerment • Focuses on individual and collective decision making **Differences to SDC** • Discusses economic empowerment in terms of incomes and assets • Not clear if reference to 'collective' empowerment incorporates the national and global scale • Focuses on increasing power	Gender, education, political empowerment, through rights-based programmes
GTZ GTZ, 2006	**Similarities with SDC** • States that empowerment is an aim of GTZ activities • Specifies 'disadvantaged sections of the population'; does not discuss youth empowerment • Incorporates economic, social, political and psychological empowerment • Views rights as important to women's empowerment • Focuses on access to resources, ability to take control of life and decision making **Differences to SDC** • Includes legal empowerment • Discusses power relations as being a core issue of empowerment • Sees empowerment as an ongoing process. • Believes that individual empowerment is required to enable collective empowerment • Only mentions individual and collective empowerment, not local, national or global	Women's empowerment through gender, HIV/AIDS and human rights programmes, youth empowerment through education, HIV/AIDS and drugs programmes
Danida Danida, 2000a Danida, 2000b Danida, 2000c Danida, 2000d Danida, 2003 Danida, 2005	**Similarities with SDC** • Shows a shift in the way it defines and approaches empowerment over the past few years **Differences to SDC** • In 2000, Danida produced an extensive document on its approach to empowerment. At this stage, the term 'empowerment' was primarily associated with individuals, mostly women. The document states that it was not Danida's practice to specifically use the term 'empowerment' in its policies, strategies and operational guidelines. However, the paper reviewed other approaches to empowerment, examples of how they were being implemented through donor recipients, and the way forward. The document implies that empowerment would become an important aspect of Danida's work • Policy and strategy since 2000 appear to have shied away from using the term 'empowerment' • Empowerment is rarely mentioned in more recent literature and there is no definition	Gender and economic empowerment

Agency (and sources)	Definition/concept of empowerment	Empowerment programmes
Norad Norad, 2000 Norad, 2006	**Similarities with SDC** • Includes individual, collective and social empowerment • Includes control and ability to participate in public decision making • Does not define power **Differences to SDC** • Empowerment is not central to Norad policy and programmes, it is often an unintended outcome • Only refers to empowerment within gender and human rights policies • Reference to empowerment always relates to power and control • Focuses only on the individual and collective level • Does not spell out how empowerment may occur	Gender, health, education, informal sector, agriculture, democracy and human rights
Sida Sida 2002 Sida 2005	**Differences to SDC** • Focuses on gender and empowerment • Mentioned briefly in Sida's policy on peace and security • Political and economic empowerment is referred to in Sida's gender equality policy but these are not defined • Sida has produced some key research papers but these are not reflected in their policy and programmes	Women's empowerment through ICT, education, health, HIV/AIDS, land management and conservation
USAID USAID, 2003 USAID, 2005 USAID, 2006	**Similarities with SDC** • Recognises importance of rights but the focus is on property rights **Differences to SDC** • No clear definition of empowerment • States that people are empowered through participation alone • Focuses on gender, political and economic empowerment • Does not mention empowerment in new major policy papers, only in country programme web pages	Women's empowerment through health, HIV/AIDS, natural resource management, good governance, education, business training and microcredit; youth economic empowerment through training, apprenticeships and entrepreneurship
CIDA CIDA, 1996 CIDA, 1999 CIDA, 2004 CIDA, 2005	Mentions empowerment in current policy documents only in relation to gender and youth in war-affected areas. Human rights paper does not mention empowerment. However, the 1999 gender equality policy provides a good definition. **Similarities with SDC** • Empowerment is both a process and an outcome • Psychological, social, political empowerment are referred to • Focuses on how to support people to empower themselves • Focuses on decision making and taking control • Focuses on confidence and self-reliance • Refers to both collective and individual empowerment • Does not define power **Differences to SDC** • Occurs only in gender equality policy and programmes (men and women); poverty reduction policy includes empowerment of women, children, minorities, the landless, the unemployed and the displaced • Economic empowerment is not included but an economic empowerment approach is used in programmes. • Emphasises giving people a voice • Does not mention national or global level empowerment • Makes mention of rights but women's empowerment programmes are often implemented alongside women's rights programmes • Does not refer to access to resources	Women's rights and empowerment, education, health, good governance, private sector development, HIV/AIDS, women's enterprise projects, microcredit, youth in war-affected areas

Agency (and sources)	Definition/concept of empowerment	Empowerment programmes
JICA	**Differences to SDC** No clear definition	
World Bank Narayan, 2002	**Similarities with SDC** • Does not define power **Differences to SDC** • The Empowerment and Poverty Reduction Sourcebook (Narayan, 2002) outlines a detailed approach to empowerment • This incorporates the individual, collective, local, national and global levels • It incorporates economic, social, political and women's empowerment, but focuses on institutions, governance, the state and markets • The short definition focuses on people taking control and participating in the decision-making process in relation to institutions that affect their lives • It fails to recognise different levels and types of empowerment • It has clearly defined and conceptualised empowerment • States that there is no single institutional model for empowerment • Provides an empowerment framework	ICT, economic empowerment, decentralisation, community empowerment, education, governance
UNDP UNDP, 1995 UNDP, 2000 UNDP, 2004 UNDP, 2005	**Similarities with SDC** • Rights can empower people, but this must be done by outsiders • Focuses on political, social, economic empowerment but from a macroeconomic perspective **Differences to SDC** • Does not provide a concise definition • Focuses on gender, MDGs and the gender empowerment measurement, economic participation and decision making, political participation and decision making, and power over economic resources • States that participation brings empowerment • Changes must be made at government level and through civil society organisations to bring about empowerment • Outsiders must facilitate the process of empowerment • Does not acknowledge the individual, psychological and radical nature of empowerment	Gender, education, economic activity, health, HIV/AIDS, microcredit, private sector development, ICT, political empowerment through parliamentary development, electoral assistance and human rights
UNHCHR UNHCHR, 2002	**Similarities with SDC** • Acknowledges the importance of rights • Focuses on men and women taking control of their lives **Differences to SDC** • Has a strong rights-based approach • Follows World Bank definitions • Emphasises accountability • Takes a national/global perspective • Does not focus on social and economic aspects, only on people's rights in the eyes of the law	
IMF IMF, 2005	**Differences to SDC** • Empowerment through attention to macroeconomic frameworks • Defines empowerment as political power, confidence and dignity • Scant discussion of what empowerment means • States that it uses a rights-based approach • Focuses on government policies • Specifies empowerment for women, children, youth, elderly and disabled	Private sector development and education

Agency (and sources)	Definition/concept of empowerment	Empowerment programmes
ActionAid UK and ActionAid International ActionAid, 2004; ActionAid, 2006	• Does not define empowerment in policies • Overall strategy mentions empowerment of women and girls but this is not defined • Focuses on social, economic, political and rights-based empowerment of women and girls and their participation in decision making	Women and girl's empowerment through education, literacy, ICT, HIV/AIDS, rights-based and land tenure programmes; women's economic empowerment through microcredit
CARE International CARE International, 2002 CARE International, 2005	**Similarities with SDC** • Rights-based approach is important • Empowerment is core to programmes • Emphasises people taking control of their lives • Recognition of empowerment at individual and collective levels • Accepts there are many different concepts and definitions of empowerment • Focuses on confidence and self-identity • Focuses on participating in the decision-making process **Differences to SDC** • Emphasises that empowered people can hold others accountable • Defines power and views these definitions as central • No emphasis on types of empowerment • No emphasis on national or global empowerment • No central definition – different departments have different or no definition • Empowerment is a process	Rights-based programmes, gender focused programmes, health, education
Concern Worldwide Concern Worldwide, 2001 Concern Worldwide, 2003	**Similarities with SDC** • Rights-based approach is important • Individual, collective, men and women • Focus on people making changes for themselves, not facilitated by outsiders • Includes knowledge **Differences to SDC** • Does not provide an overall definition • Empowerment and women's empowerment is central to all the work • Regularly uses the term 'genuine empowerment' • Does not recognise different types of empowerment (social, political, economic etc.) in its definition • Does not include national or global aspects	Health, HIV/AIDS, education, capacity building, livelihoods and microfinance; gender and youth are integral to programmes

Agency (and sources)	Definition/concept of empowerment	Empowerment programmes
Oxfam International and Oxfam GB Oxfam GB, 2003 Oxfam GB, 2005	**Similarities with SDC** • Views empowerment as both a process and an outcome • Focuses on people's self-awareness, rights, ability to organise and control resources for themselves **Differences to SDC** • Not clearly defined in policy documents or on the website other than in Oxfam (2005) • Provides a definition and diagram of power • Provides a comprehensive but complex framework for empowerment, but does not provide a concise definition; the framework incorporates psychological, economic, cultural, political and social dimensions • Recognises that the meaning of empowerment varies depending on the people, level, place and time • Provides in-depth discussion on women's empowerment and elements for capacity building for empowerment	Women's empowerment, education, health and livelihoods
Save the Children Save the Children UK, 2003 Save the Children UK, 2005	**Similarities with SDC** • Deals with individual and collective empowerment • Focuses on participation in decision making for NGO programmes and public policy • Mentions self-confidence and dignity • Includes social, political, young people and women's empowerment **Differences to SDC** • Does not provide a concise definition of empowerment • Has a strong rights-based approach to policy and programming • Focuses on power relations and provides definitions • Bases approach on women's and political empowerment frameworks and adapts these to work with young people • Mentions access to entitlements • Uses the term 'citizen empowerment' • Mentions the process from individual to collective empowerment	Young people's and children's empowerment and community (adults that affect the young people's lives) empowerment through education, health, HIV/AIDS, equality and rights, poverty and economics, exploitation and protection programmes

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