IS EMPOWERMENT POSSIBLE UNDER A NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT ENVIRONMENT? SOME LESSONS FROM INDIA

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ABSTRACT: *The article examines whether results-based management approaches to development program management are appropriate to the strategic shift to a governance agenda to promote broader citizen participation and its emphasis on increased empowerment. Empowerment is about people having expanded choices and a much greater level of involvement and control in all parts of their family and community lives. This is recognized as important in development policy areas such as good governance, promoting civil society, and decentralization. Using field research from fifteen NGOs working with poor women in India, the author shows that downward accountability and time are significant factors in empowerment. Results-based management approaches that have entered the field of project management over the past decade have the paradoxical effect of disempowering those it is meant to empower.*

Over the past decade there have been major changes in the theories and approaches to development policy and practice by donor development agencies. These changes have been characterized by, first, a move away from supporting centralized government structures towards decentralized structures that place greater emphasis on individual responsibility and autonomy—i.e., empowerment. Second is a new approach to managing development programs that is very much results-based and modeled on the theories of the new managerialism or New Public Management (NPM) theories that dominate modern public sector management (Hailey and Sorgenfrei 2003; Hirschman 1999). The most common manifestations in development practice of NPM are promoted by the OECD and include results-based management processes such as output-based contracting and the extensive use of logical framework analysis (Logframe) to plan, design, and implement development projects (Binnendijk 2000). The question that this article is concerned with is whether these results-based management approaches to development program management can deal with the

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strategic shift to a governance agenda, and in particular the promotion of broader citizen participation through their increased empowerment.

The new strategic approach to development has seen an increased focus on governance in all of its forms. This has involved support for not only state institutions but also for social institutions such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society actors advancing human rights, all with a focus on the role and responsibilities of citizens and their relationship with the state. Of particular concern with aid agencies is the role of the most marginal in this process—women, the poor, ethnic minorities, and others. In this context the term empowerment fits easily into the development lexicon. What was once the preserve of NGOs has become increasingly common in the rhetoric used in the policies and programs of other development agencies, including the official bilateral and multilateral organizations (World Bank 2001a; Narayan 2002). This article will use as a starting point a relatively straightforward definition of empowerment in terms of a poverty focus as being the increased ability of the poor to make political, social, or economic choices, and to act on those choices (Kabeer 1999; Narayan 2002).

Related to the question of what empowerment might be is the practical question of how the poor might be empowered or, more correctly, use development resources to empower themselves—i.e., to take power in a meaningful way that makes a difference to their lives. This question needs to be asked about many groups in society—for example, women, who have been systematically disempowered by culture, patriarchy, or oppressive political structures (Janardhan 1995). Part of the process of using development resources to enable self-empowerment lies in the accountability relationships that the disempowered have with the development agent, which in turn pose questions as to how an empowerment program might be managed by a development agency (Earle 2003). This article will use a small number of NGO programs in India as case examples to examine the factors that lead to strong empowerment outcomes, and then relate them to the trends of current development management practices.

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

As noted above, one emerging trend in development practice is a recognition that people should have a greater say in matters that directly affect them. If this is put into power terms, they should be able to influence the social and political agents they engage with (Crawley 1998; Couto 1998). The rhetoric of decentralization, empowerment, participation, all wrapped up into the notion of supporting civil society, is common to virtually all development agencies. However, this recognition of empowerment and decentralized decision-making structures (the principle of subsidiarity), when combined with the approach of NPM, leads to a paradox—these managerial approaches center control (and power) with the donor, the source of resources, while empowerment endeavors to do the opposite. Rondinelli (1983) argued that "the planning and management procedures adopted by governments and international aid agencies for preparing and implementing development projects became more detailed and rigid at the same time that development problems were recognized as more uncertain and less amenable to systematic analysis and design" (65).

New Public Management in Development Practice

While NPM is used to cover a broad number of approaches to public management, the main features are a focus on external accountability upwards to the resource providers, economic sustainability (which implies fewer government transfers or subsidies), managerial effectiveness, and operational efficiency. The effect is to focus on intra-organizational goals and the "propagation of perspectives which regard social and political issues as technical and/or procedural issues, that is, matters to be managed" (Desai and Imrie 1998, 636). Decision making is generally top down and centrally driven (Bryson 1987). In practice, it is characterized by top-down planning, performance measured through *ex ante* indicators, and stringent accountability processes to the resource providers (Dunn and Williams 1993). Last but not least is the feature pertinent to this article, that NPM tends to overlook or ignore the features of pro-social citizenship behavior such as voluntarism, trust, cooperation, altruism, etc., that all "promote effectiveness in the public arena" (Vigoda and Golembeiwski 2001, 274).

While NPM is hotly debated in other sectors such as health, and education within the OECD (O'Brien and Down 2002; Reed 1999), the debate is more muted in the management of development assistance despite the paradox outlined above (Pieterse 2000; Chambers et al. 2001; Cooke 2001; Earle 2003). Generally, there is a tacit acceptance of the results-based management tools and procedures promoted under the NPM rubric (Binnendijk 2000). However, the core problem remains—the application of results-based management to the management of development projects leaves little space for a role of the beneficiary in project design, planning, or even implementation. Chambers et al. (2001) argue that a managerial approach can "weaken or kill participation, ownership and local self-reliance, undermining social networks and leading to low quality in programs . . . Staff are disempowered and demotivated when they lack discretion and are driven by targets and orders from above . . ." (2).

Even NGOs that are seen as being closer to the beneficiaries of development programs are having their purported advantages worn away by a focus on procedural targets (Desai and Imrie 1998). The focus on measurable results using tools and processes that are externally determined moves the focus away from the beneficiaries or NGO constituents, and so, to some extent, is disempowering of those who are meant to be empowered (Wandersman et al. 2000). Vigoda and Golembiewski (2001) argue that "new public management encourages passivity and discourages the use of power or voice [by the citizen] and overlooks self-derived, spontaneous, and voluntary actions" (275).

The managerial approach to development practice has strengthened over the past decade (Binnendijk 2000; Hailey and Sorgenfrei 2003). While there are some attempts to reconcile the social processes in the field of development management (Brinkerhoff and Coston 1999), these contributions tend to be normative statements relating to the broader strategic policy adopted by development agencies rather than in the day-to-day management of projects. Unlike changes in development policy that emphasize decentralization and greater participation and autonomy, approaches to project management remain anchored in the idea of certainty of outcomes and the capacity to manage for this certainty (Samoff 1996; Gasper 2000).

In the broad public sector, the NPM focus has been on quality management and performance measurement (Hailey and Sorgenfrei 2003). In development practice, the new managerial focus and search for certainty has been realized through the tool of the logical framework analysis and its variants in the form of results-based management frameworks (CIDA 2002) and objectives-oriented project planning (GTZ 1997).[1] The Logframe is a linear model describing a project's design. It is built on a matrix that presents a logically connected hierarchy of objectives (from inputs to activities, to objectives, and finally to a goal) on one axis, and a set of targets and sources of information for each level of objective on the other axis. Finally, there is a list of conditions or assumptions that must be met for the project to succeed (Hailey and Sorgenfrei 2003, 10).

This logical approach attempts to focus development management more sharply on the efficiency of development programs and projects (Binnendijk 2000; Dale 2003). In summary, they try to identify a series of predetermined causal linkages between the inputs for a project and the achievement of its objective and goal. Predetermined measurable and quantifiable indicators (usually identified by the donor) are established, against which progress can be measured and contracts paid (AusAID 2002; Earle 2003). Uncertainty is generally covered by a poorly developed set of optimistic assumptions (Gasper 2000; Earle 2003). In this context there is very little space for the beneficiary to have meaningful and ongoing input.

An integral part of this approach is the role of accountability. Even though notions of empowerment and participation suggest that accountability should be downward to the beneficiary, the NPM approaches tend to focus accountability upward to the donor—effectively at the expense of the beneficiary. As Earle indicates, the Logframe is "incompatible with participatory approaches that attempt to empower beneficiaries and involve them in decision-making processes" (2003, 7).

The basis for the change to results-based management systems in development management lies in private-sector approaches becoming more widely adopted in public-sector management—including in the provision of social services (Wandersman et al. 2000; Earle 2003). However, even in social development projects in developing countries, where the outcomes are much less certain, the use of Logframe (and similar results-based management approaches that seek to prescribe outcomes) is becoming the norm. This shift in management approaches raises two key problems, inflexibility and the assumption of certainty. Instead, there should be a focus on greater local participation and cultural awareness (Earle 2003).

The search for certainty in projects is not new. For example, a study of an integrated rural development project in Kenya implemented through the 1980s argued that its deficiencies were mainly due to an externally driven managerial approach (Porter et al. 1991). Bond and Hulme (1999) argue that the success of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation's (NORAD) integrated rural development project in Sri Lanka was due to a flexible process approach that involved a greater role for beneficiaries (1340-1343). The features of the management of this particular project were flexible and phased implementation with a small-scale startup and long time frames, action learning cycles (heuristic approaches), beneficiary participation in decision making, and high levels of local control. While the evidence from studies like

Bond and Hulme (1999) and Porter et al. (1991) are compelling, the lessons generally have not entered the mainstream as good practice models.

There have been some attempts to reconcile the problem of inflexibility in results-based management systems with empowerment and organic outcomes, as well as suggestions on how the Logframe can be humanized and made more flexible (GTZ 1997; Odame 2001). In some instances, this inflexibility is blamed on the Logframe's inappropriate application rather than the tool itself (Hailey and Sorgenfrei 2003). It is argued, however, that these modifications and qualifications do not address the point that any instrumental approach with fixed (tangible) output targets (such as the Logframe) runs counter to the notion of empowerment (Earle 2003; Elliot 1987; Edwards and Sen 2000). Second is that the Logframe is used very inflexibly in what Gasper (2000) calls the lockframe approach, which can shackle a program. Donors often have very detailed requirements for making changes, and often make payments on tangible milestones set by the indicator column of the Logframe. These features lock out flexibility. Changes to the Logframe are generally frowned upon, or at best require a series of formal approvals that often frighten off the most assiduous program manager (for an example, see AusAID 2002).

Certainty in Development Practice

The second problem with results-based management approaches lies in the search for certainty and predictability (Rondinelli 1983; Samoff 1996). For people living in a poor village, changes in their status through the expanded choices that empowerment brings can also lead to more uncertainty and unpredictable outcomes (Kabeer 1999; Murthy 2001). These outcomes may be positive or negative (in a social sense), and indicate that shifts in power are not stable processes even at the level of the family or the village. A related point is the increasing impatience of results-based development, in which measurable change often is expected in as brief a time frame as three to five years when what we may be seeking is intergenerational change (Fernandez 1998; Berg et al. 1998; Hishigsuren 2000).

While the notion of the project has been the organizing principle for development for the last three decades, the time pressure and focus on results has meant that donors have increasing levels of control over projects' performance (Charlton and May 1995; Elliot 1987). The evidence does not support the efficacy of time-bound approaches to human development processes. A GTZ (German technical cooperation program) evaluation found that projects of less than five years without intensive process-oriented support are bound to fail (Martins et al. 2002). Given these difficulties in their management, why are empowerment programs given such a high priority in modern development practice?

THE RATIONALE FOR EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS

The rationale for empowerment approaches in development practice arises from an increasing recognition that for poverty alleviation to be sustained there needs to be a greater role for the poor in the social, economic, and political spheres which shape their lives (Narayan 2002; UNDP 1997; USAID 1995; AusAID 2001). Recent

literature on the nature of poverty casts it not only in terms of material deprivation, but also in the language of disempowerment. Amartya Sen (1999) refers to poverty in terms of capability deprivation, and a lack of access to fundamental freedoms.

Likewise, the World Bank, in its *Voices of the Poor* report, found that the poor saw poverty in terms of a lack of well-being, or ill-being (Narayan 1999). This lack of well-being was related to "bad feelings" by the poor about self, perceptions of powerlessness over one's life, voicelessness, anxiety and fear for the future (33), and material and physical deprivation. This view of poverty is in line with notions of disempowerment that refer to a "lack of control over destiny" (Campbell and Jovchelovitch 2000, 261), or events which are manifestly unfair or an affront to dignity (Kane and Montgomery 1998) and isolate the individual from decision-making processes (Puroshothaman 1998).

Aid agencies such as the World Bank and bilateral donors are now equating poverty, at least at a social and political level, to the disempowerment of individuals and groups. However, for a poverty approach that deals with the fundamental issue of disempowerment to be successful, there has to be a fundamental change in how development projects are managed. At a policy level, development agencies are beginning to recognize this (Brinkerhoff and Coston 1999). AusAID (2001) and the World Bank (Narayan 1999) argue that the lack of accountability to the poor by organizations and institutions (NGOs as well as government) is itself a dimension of poverty. They argue that part of being powerless lies in the poor not having a say in the organizations and institutions which interact with them. This is primarily government, but also includes other local institutions such as NGOs and other agencies involved in development projects, whether they be contractors, government agencies, or multilateral or bilateral organizations.

The deprivation that constitutes poverty, then, is not only in resources for basic necessities, but also in terms of " accountability *from* state institutions and civil society" (AusAID 2001, 15) [emphasis added]. The poor, in fact, want "to be empowered to be able to negotiate their interests with . . . NGOs [and other development agents] and to have greater ownership of programs" (18). The World Bank argues that "participatory processes are needed to give voice to the priorities of the poor and to better enable them to hold formal institutions more accountable" (World Bank Institute 2001, 1). This view of poverty as disempowerment is in line with empowerment theory, which also posits that greater participation in community and development activities and organizations is associated with empowerment (Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988).

Despite the changing view of poverty as disempowerment, development practice (as shown in many donor project management documents) has shown little change in involving the local communities and beneficiaries in any meaningful way in project planning, design, or implementation. For example, USAID's democratic governance programming handbook (2000) makes little mention of participation. The World Bank similarly notes evaluation findings, indicating that participation had not gone much beyond relatively superficial information and consultation processes in the majority of its projects (2001a, 2001b). One of the reasons for this poor adoption of participatory approaches is that the new managerial systems being adopted do not seem to encourage meaningful change in this area.

EMPOWERMENT IN PRACTICE

At a practical level, empowerment involves the expansion of the capacity of the poor, through social linkages, to deal with personal and social problems as they arise (Kabeer 1999; Korten 1983; Schneider 1999; Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988). In the social domain, these social linkages might include short-term assistance from community networks for the family in the event of illness or death, through both emotional support and tangible support as donations or loans of cash or kind. In the longer term, the networks can assist in working with the community or government to provide support in the form of food, water, space, child care, etc. (Moser 1998, 13). However, any community-level development occurs in the local social domain, where the very poor are often excluded by virtue of their relative lack of power in social relations.

Spreitzer et al. (1999) identify five dimensions of personal empowerment:

- meaning—i.e., beliefs, values, and behaviors;
- competence or self-efficacy—i.e., being able to carry out particular tasks or roles;
- self-determination—the ability to initiate or regulate actions;
- impact—or how the outcomes of others are influenced; and
- how people understand and relate to their social environment and the role of collectives in community life.

Empowerment, therefore, encompasses far more than material/economic objectives. It encompasses broader personal psychological and capacity dimensions, and also a community dimension. This has implications for how an empowerment program might be carried out. Empowerment in this context lies in the relationship with the people and institutions with whom the poor interact, and how these institutions influence this relationship (Couto 1998). The outcomes of these processes are a raised level of personal empowerment for political action and a redistribution of resources and/or decision making (Rissel 1994; Calman 1992).

For example, many development interventions for empowerment target women, who are often the most disempowered in any community setting due to factors related to patriarchy (Jandhyala 1998). These interventions, however, are generally based on economic and poverty paradigms that assume that the most appropriate path to empowerment lies in overcoming physical or economic resource constraints, and that there is an economic priority in people's lives (Schneider 1999, 524). That is, economic and physical well-being results in sociopolitical benefits through the increased choices that these benefits can bring. When the target group is women, this process is overlaid with a gender dimension by which women are being offered an economic solution that may not be relevant to their particular situation of disempowerment.

The problems identified with these economic-based assumptions for women's disempowerment is that many development programs for empowerment often have outcomes that limit choice and decision making of the individual woman while benefiting a broader group such as the family (Kabeer 2001). The evidence points to these programs increasing the workloads of women, putting them under more pressure

from within the families and even from the development agency's staff (Rahman 1999; Goetz and Gupta 1996, 61; Mayoux 1995, 2001). The result has the paradoxical effect of reducing the choices available to women by adding to their burdens while trying to empower them (Weissberg 2000). Hirschman (1998, 231) argues that "the view that poor women only organize around economic issues in a passive and defensive way denies them agency and consciousness and misunderstanding that the struggle itself can be a politically transformative process."

This example emphasizes that empowerment is more than disempowered people gaining the ability to undertake more economic activities. They must be able to go a step further and set their own agendas and influence events (Crawley 1998; Goetz 2001; Murthy 2001). Empowerment involves people in an active role, not only in decision making, but also in understanding the factors that shape a situation, including the nature of their oppression (Crawley 1998). Day and Klein (1987) argue that power is exercised when one party holds another party accountable for their actions—i.e., the process of holding another to account is an empowering one.

Others take this argument a step further and argue that it is the level of formality or certainty in the accountability processes that is important in empowerment (Lee et al. 1999, 86). More formal processes establish a right to participate in decision making (Joshi and Moore 2000). This is in line with the recent policy approaches outlined above that seek a greater role for beneficiaries in all stages of interventions that affect their lives. I will return to this point in the discussion of the research findings on accountability. Finally, Jandhyala argues that empowering processes can operate to "legitimize women's entry into nontraditional spaces [and] creates new spaces" (1998, 205). However, most development agencies have difficulty grappling with the power relations underlying the construction of difference between men and women, and between other groups in society (Murthy 2001).

AN EXAMINATION OF EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS IN INDIA

In order to look at the institutional factors that effect empowerment and the possible role of NPM processes in project management, I conducted a comparative analysis of fifteen Indian NGOs[2] working with women's groups, operating primarily across two states in Southern and Western India—Maharashtra and Karnataka. India was chosen because it is a modern, liberal democratic state, with federal structures and a commitment to decentralization/devolution of local-level decision making to local government structures. As such, it has relatively few institutional constraints to empowerment-based work. These characteristics create an institutional environment conducive for promoting empowerment. The districts chosen for the study (Kolar and Dharwad districts in Karnataka and Pune, Karjat, and Nagpur districts in Maharashtra) have a relatively high density of small- and medium-size NGOs working with poor and marginalized communities. NGOs were selected for investigation based on their commitment to empowerment as a means of addressing community issues around poverty and marginalization.

Typically, Indian NGOs engage in empowerment work through facilitating and working with self-help groups, each comprising around twenty people—usually women. These groups meet regularly for both the purpose of savings and credit

programs and also training and social mobilization activities. Following are brief qualitative descriptions of three NGOs deemed successful in achieving empowerment.

- India Development Service (IDS). In 1974, IDS was started by non-resident Indians in Chicago, with an aim of fundraising mainly among themselves for development work in India. In 1977 two members of IDS visited India with the aim of making the program operational, settled in Dharwad in Karnataka in 1979, and registered IDS in India in the same year with a commitment to economic and social development. IDS works in drought-prone areas of Dharwad district in 100 villages and 20 hamlets with around 500 self-help groups—the majority of which are women's groups. The groups are usually created by forming village development societies, which are federated at the subdistrict level. IDS has around 50 staff in the field. The board of directors takes a direct interest in beneficiary welfare, with board members regularly meeting the groups and thus providing direct accountability to the communities.

- SNDT Rag-pickers Program. The rag-pickers program had its genesis in the late 1980s, when the Department of Adult and Continuing Education of SNDT Women's University (Pune Campus) started a program in the urban slums of Pune working with waste-pickers, who were the poorest and most marginalized in the community. The approach was to advocate for waste-picking to be recognized by local government as a legitimate occupation. From this the idea of a trade union emerged and in 1993 the *Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat*, the association of waste-pickers, was formally registered. It currently has a membership of 5,000 women from 122 slums in and around Pune City. SNDT provides support to the association though mobilization and training programs with waste-pickers. The staff of SNDT are effectively seconded to the various bodies of the association, such as the cooperative. The waste-picker program adopts a different model than most other NGO programs, with the emphasis more sharply focused not only on the rights of the constituency, but on their active role in the process. The waste-pickers are actively involved in identifying program priorities, identification, and design, in a formal process. This occurs through monthly meetings that involve a high level of direct staff accountability to the waste-picking women.

- Grama Vikas. Grama Vikas is a medium-sized NGO based in Kolar district Karnataka that focuses particularly on low caste women and children. It started in 1980 with an initial emphasis on child development. This was expanded into a women's empowerment program relatively early on, based on the belief that child development is only possible when women have an active role in development activities. The strategy of Grama Vikas is to start with child development through the establishment of preschools and, after some village acceptance is reached, to develop self-help groups with the most marginalized in the community.

Grama Vikas will only expand its programs at the rate of the capacity of the groups to self-manage, with Grama Vikas staff moving out of direct group management as soon as possible. Similarly, in the overall management of the program,

there are two separate community organizations that are taking over the responsibility for management of the technical programs. These two bodies are responsible for the day-to-day running of the programs, while Grama Vikas is involved in higher-level advocacy and broader strategic work. This structure provides a high degree of direct accountability of the management of the program to the constituency.

An Analysis of Factors Affecting Empowerment

Using a sample of self-help groups supported by selected NGOs, I collected data through focus group discussions. A total of seventy-seven groups were interviewed. I used a range of open-ended questions relating to what the women learned, how their lives changed, and what material assets they obtained since joining the groups. Other questions dealt with decision-making processes in the group, formal or informal interactions with the sponsoring NGO, participation in village political processes, and the level of trust and cooperation in the village. I collected additional data from interviews with selected NGOs on their various accountability relationships with government, donors, and the community.

The data on empowerment was based on the reported changes that women experienced, and how this translated into agency—increased choices and opportunities to act on those choices. I categorized the answers they gave into broad areas or taxonomies (Hines 1993) of change, which the women themselves saw as being important, and then ranked and scored these responses according to five categories the women identified. These were the ability to:

- go out of the house;
- meet with officials;
- travel independently outside the village;
- attend village meetings, etc.; and,
- enter political processes.

The ranking used was a score of 0 for no change, a score of 1 to go out of the house, through to a score of 5 for being able to confidently enter political processes. This score is the basis for the independent variable of empowerment for the statistical analysis detailed below.

I analyzed the data from the survey using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods (Sandelowski 2000; Hines 1993), and a statistical analysis identified those statistically significant variables that affect empowerment (table 1). The independent variables examined were: accountability of the NGO to the groups; endowments of group members in terms of caste, education levels, and land holdings; village social capital; and, the number of years the groups had been meeting. These were chosen based on the literature and practice that had identified these issues to varying degrees either for targeting or as important in local-level development work. The work that was promoted through the groups was mainly savings and credit schemes, but in many cases also involved some income-generation activities and, in a few cases, local-level advocacy work.

TABLE 1
Results of the Spearman Rank Correlation[3]

Independent Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	ρ	p-value
Accountability	2.610	1.1546	0.35	0.0018
Caste	2.513	1.5894	-0.17	0.1334
Education	1.883	1.3176	0.05	0.6608
Land	2.591	1.3370	-0.13	0.2444
Village social capital	2.948	0.6766	0.06	0.6195
Size of group	22.234	19.5737	0.04	0.7358
Years of group	3.653	2.4516	0.26	0.0240

Note: n =77; empowerment is the dependent variable.

As table 1 indicates, the two statistically significant factors for empowerment were downward accountability and the number of years the group had been meeting.

Downward Accountability and Empowerment

Downward accountability, that is, accountability to the community groups, was measured by the level of formality in the processes the NGO adopted—in other words, the established processes the NGO had in place for involving the community groups in its programming. Being public benefit organizations (and, as such, nonmembership bodies), NGOs are not required to have regular meetings as are membership bodies such as cooperatives or unions. The type of accountability to its beneficiaries is something that the NGO can choose. To measure accountability, a ranking scale was applied in much the same way as for empowerment. A low score was given for more irregular and informal processes, and high scores for formal accountability processes such as regular and frequent decision-making meetings with the groups.

In those cases where high empowerment outcomes were recorded, there was a reduced emphasis on NPM approaches to project management in favor of longer term, more flexible approaches. In the case of Grama Vikas (Kolar) it was long-term child sponsorship funds which, after covering the basic requirement of providing certain preschool facilities and a nutrition program, provided a largely untied grant for community development with the most poor and marginalized women in the community. This provided Grama Vikas with both the resources and the flexibility to adapt and develop a highly responsive and (downward) accountable program. The result was a very successful empowerment program over nearly a twenty-year period.

In the case of the SNDT waste-picker program in Pune City, a single donor was asked for a relatively small, loosely-tied institutional grant to cover a handful of staff to undertake extension work with the waste-picker women in an urban environment. The number of staff and the scale of work changed very little over a decade, something that enabled a constant but flexible focus. There is now a large independent union of waste-pickers who are no longer seen as outcasts but rather have a direct say

in Pune City waste management practices. Most importantly, they now have no further need of outside support. It is doubtful that this outcome could have been programmed in advance as a conventional development project, given the huge social and cultural shift that individuals experienced over the life of the engagement with the facilitating agency.

In these cases of high empowerment outcomes the key was a relatively hands-off donor approach. The approach to project management was characterized by analyzing the outcomes as they emerged over time, and adjusting the program accordingly, rather than focusing on the original design. The only outcomes that may have been outlined in advance were in the broad terms of self-reliance and autonomy, but with no target date.

Those NGOs with more informal accountability processes generally saw their institutional priorities quite separate to their work on the ground. For example, some of the NGOs spent considerable energy dealing with donors and governments and managing projects, which they felt was not a concern of the constituency. These NGOs felt that direct accountability mechanisms to the constituency might in some ways compromise them institutionally, and limit their capacity for expansion or dealing with other stakeholders such as donors.

In India, the poor and marginalized (such as low caste women) generally have no say in calling other people to account, either within or outside their families. They are generally excluded from decision making at both the household and village levels and have few opportunities to engage with other people, let alone be able to hold people to account for their actions (Janardhan 1995). In this context, being able to hold a development agency and their staff accountable for their work is by its very nature empowering. It provides a catalyst to extend the relations the disempowered might have with the development agent to other domains in their lives. This harkens back to the psychological dimensions of empowerment outlined above which point to a feedback loop—that is, as individual confidence and assertiveness rises, this feeds back into the group and further strengthens the empowerment outcomes.

In summary, these findings on accountability point to the desirability of a development agency having direct mechanisms of accountability to beneficiaries if empowerment outcomes are to be maximized. The findings also point to fundamental limitations of development agencies as empowerment agents. If an agency is not required to be accountable they are less likely to hand over power to the beneficiaries in the way the cases above have indicated. Joshi and Moore, for example, are "skeptical of the capacity or willingness of any but the most exceptional organizations to encourage or even tolerate the autonomous and potentially antagonistic mobilization of their own client groups" (2000, 49). Skepticism is likely to be even more warranted if a development agency such as a contractor has a formal contractual relationship with a donor who has prescribed the expected outcomes and approaches to be taken in managing these development programs, something often required in results-based frameworks.

What emerges is a tension between the expectations placed on a development agency by its own donors, for efficiency and predictable results on one hand—its upward accountability—and the desire for effective empowerment programs, on the

other. However, the findings indicate that effective empowerment requires downward accountability processes, which lead to less certain or predictable outcomes.

All of the NGOs that participated in the research recognized, to varying degrees, the importance of some level of accountability to their constituency. This was not only for transparency reasons but also because they recognize it is part of the empowerment process. However, as discussed above, of the fifteen NGOs surveyed only two handed power over in a direct sense (SNDT and Grama Vikas) and only one other actively promoted a direct role of their constituency in strategic programming (IDS). The second significant indicator for empowerment was the period for which the group had been meeting, another factor that results-based program management practices influence.

The Period for Which the Group Had Been Meeting

It would be expected that those groups that had been meeting and working together for a longer time would exhibit stronger empowerment outcomes. One reason may be that over time the benefits of a group working together builds individual confidence and opens opportunities for individual action. More time together as a group enables women to build trust and confidence to take power and responsibility within the group —i.e., make choices and take action. Despite this finding, many project managers and donors are seeking to reduce the time that agencies engage with self-help groups.

The danger of setting time limits to achieve empowerment objectives is that projects may target those people in communities who are more likely to be able to go it alone after a certain period—i.e., not necessarily the most needy. If NGOs target the most needy and expect change in a relatively short time frame, there is the risk that any empowerment may not be sustained (Berg et al. 1998). Interviews with NGOs suggest that a program management approach can be adopted that seeks a balance between efficiency (the time spent with groups) and effectiveness (the empowerment outcomes that more time may bring). The accounts of some of the NGOs surveyed indicate that some donors seek a management approach that is less flexible—they often seek to limit the period of NGO engagement with self-help groups to a period of three to five years. Experience indicates, however, that for the most marginalized up to ten years may be required. This was the case with both the waste-picker program in Pune and Grama Vikas in Kolar.

Empowerment and Results-based Management Frameworks

The findings of these two factors for empowerment, downward accountability and time, have implications for the management of development programs. Research findings point to a fundamental clash between appropriate processes that facilitate empowerment and the results-based management approach now being required. The three NGOs that had scored the highest in empowerment outcomes of their constituents, described above, had some common characteristics. First was a very long time horizon for their intervention in a particular community. At the outset, all three NGOs saw their commitment to a particular community as enduring at least ten years. The second common characteristic was that they had stable, long-term funding sources, which

gave them a high degree of autonomy to determine how their objectives would be achieved and how resources should be allocated.

These approaches are generally not possible within a results-based framework that is output-based and time-bound in outlook. Empowerment outcomes such as those described above would generally have been regarded as not specific enough or sufficiently time-bound for the results-based management approaches. This point raises some questions as to whether a results-based management approach is the most appropriate way to proceed in empowerment and other social process-based programs, as opposed to more heuristic approaches such as those outlined above and described in Bond and Hulme (1999).

The first question is whether there is a place for a logical approach in an uncertain world. At the level of lower-order objectives (inputs and activities), Logframe has an advantage—it assures the resources are sufficient to undertake activities and that these activities achieve their outputs with reasonable efficiency. However, the problem with this logical approach is that it is often used not only to predict outcomes but also to suggest an impact, both of which are tenuous when we speak of empowerment. The Logframe should not be an end, but rather a tool to check to see if the various pieces of a program make sense and fit together, especially after changes have been made.

The second question relates to the whole notion of a project, that is, a (fairly short-term) time-bound concept that is usually beyond the understanding of a poor person (the beneficiary) who may have a much longer time horizon. In many cases the poor see change as being something that makes a difference to their children's lives, not necessarily to their own. The waste-picker women of Pune saw changes to their lives as important, but what they saw as more important was that their children would not have to depend on the same drudgery as they did in order to survive. For these women empowerment was, in part, intergenerational. The modern search for quick fixes prefers much higher discount rates in a cost-benefit sense—i.e., a much shorter time frame for a return on a donor's investment than empowerment processes might allow. The solution, as the Indian examples illustrate, might lie in much longer-term flexible engagements.

The third issue is the power relationship inherent to project management. Traditionally, those who provide the resources hold and use the power to control how those resources are used. This poses a dilemma, in that participation theory since the 1950s has linked strong project outcomes with participation of the intended beneficiaries in design and implementation of activities. As Arnstein (1969) pointed out with her 'ladder of participation,' participation may be achieved in many ways. These range from propaganda and information, to various degrees of consultation, to partnership arrangements in project management, and, finally, to control being vested in the end user or beneficiary. To some extent such a wide range of meanings renders the term meaningless.

The finding that downward accountability to the constituents or beneficiaries of a development project is a strong indicator of empowerment is important. It suggests that a much higher level of control by constituents and more formal relationships with constituents in program management may be required for effective empowerment to occur. Joshi and Moore (2000) made a similar finding with their study of the employment guarantee scheme in Maharashtra in India. For this more formal

relationship with beneficiaries to occur, donors would have to give up some power and bear some of the risks in managing development work. In this age of public scrutiny of aid budgets and donor practices in general this may be unlikely, despite policy positions that this is what is needed.

CONCLUSION

Empowerment, as discussed in this article, is about choice, decision making, and being able to influence others—and so it is arguably difficult, if not impossible, to predict the outcomes of an empowerment program. These outcomes can be chaotic, determined by the beneficiary, and often very slow in being realized. On the other hand, an instrumental approach to project management is very much predicated on certainty and a logical flow of input to activities that should be able to see a range of predetermined objectives being met. The dilemma that arises for modern development management is how to manage an efficient and accountable approach to programming that can actually deliver effective change in power relationships, and as a consequence greater participation of all in community life.

This article has argued, first, that more flexible approaches should be adopted that recognize that part of the empowerment process is giving beneficiary groups a much greater level of control of programs that are ostensibly for their benefit. This can be done through approaches that are more process- than outcome-oriented, which seek to see progressive, positive changes in peoples lives rather than meeting externally prescribed targets. The second point is that it is possible to adopt a program approach in which the strictly time-bound project is not the central unit of management, but rather inputs and activities are allocated in order to achieve progressive change over longer time frames. The natural corollary is less micromanagement and scrutiny of inputs per se in favor of more evaluative processes of change over time. Whether this approach is realistic in bilateral programs in the current political environment of development skepticism is questionable.

This article has highlighted a divergence of policy with practice in the field of managing development projects and programs with empowerment as an objective. On one hand, research has shown that empowerment is about people having expanded choices and a much greater level of involvement and control in all parts of their family and community lives. This is recognized as important in development policy areas such as good governance, promoting civil society, and decentralization. On the other hand, results-based management, which has entered the field of project management over the past decade, has had the effect of disempowering those it is meant to empower—who become bound to externally determined activities and priorities.

The way forward seems to point to approaches that are more in line with a strategic change in policy. These see a focus on local broad-based control of development programs, a new paradigm emphasizing downward accountability, and a general acceptance of uncertainty as being part of development. This poses some challenges to the proponents of NPM who seek to centralize power and control in development management.

NOTES

1. The Logframe is generally not found outside of development practice, but within it has been adopted by most official development agencies and many NGOs.

2. NGOs are generally used by most official aid agencies for empowerment programs with very poor and marginalized communities in developing countries. This is mainly because of the high transaction costs other types of organizations, such as commercial or for-profit entities, have to bear in relation to their operations in other sectors of society. There are, however, some cases of organizations such as universities and government departments involved in these types of programs.

3. Spearman's rank correlation measures the correlation between two variables and works on ranked (relative) data. It does not depend on the assumption of a normal distribution. Spearman's method calculates the sums of the squares of the differences in paired ranks (di2) according to the formula: $r = 1 - 6*(d12 + d22 + ... + dn2)/(n(n2-1))$, in which n is the number of observations (Lewis 1997).

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