Participation and Citizenship: Exploring Power for Change

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‘Power’ is increasingly re-entering the development vocabulary. And is critical to meaningful citizenship and democracy.

- ‘Development is about giving people power over their own lives. This empowerment cannot be achieved without democracy and a society which gives its citizens the rights to influence decisions about their own future…’
  ---‘Sweden’s policy for global development’
- DFID – research on power, politics and the state
- INGOs – challenging power and poverty relations
- UK – The Power Commission
Understanding and challenging power relations is an important part of IDS values and vision

  - a concern for equity and social justice as well as for poverty reduction
  - an explicit recognition of the power relations that shape development processes
  - a vision of a world in which ‘citizens have greater power to influence the state and private institutions to work in ways that accelerate poverty reduction and promote social justice’

- Recent work by the Participation, Power and Social Change team

- IDS Bulletin – Exploring Power for Change
Power is itself a highly contested concept

- Some see power as held by actors (powerful and powerless);
- Some see power as zero-sum (to gain power others must lose);
- Some see power as ‘negative’ as in ‘control’;
- Others see it as more pervasive and embodied in all relationships and discourses;
- Others see it as more fluid and accumulative;
- Others see it as more ‘positive’, as necessary for agency and positive action.
Our own experiences of power often affect how we see it

- Much of my view shaped by my own history of engaging with power relations in a particular context
- Working with poor citizens in a remote mining valley of one of poorest parts of US to claim political, economic and social rights vis a vis government and a London-based corporate mine owner
- Conventional views of power in America failed to explain the reality I encountered
- Inspired by then current work of Steven Lukes – Power: A Radical View
And yet power is changing

- Changing perceptions of public authority
  - *create new spaces for engagement, and new forms of power within and between them*
- Changing relationships of the local, national and global
  - *alter understanding of where power is located and where it may be exercised*
- Changing role of knowledge and expertise in a globalised world
  - *creates new boundaries which affect whose voices enter policy processes, and whose knowledge counts within them*
A proliferation of spaces for citizen participation in governance

- Local level
  - programs of democratic decentralisation

- National Level
  - sectoral programmes
  - poverty policies and poverty reduction strategies

- Global Level
  - policies of global governance – e.g. trade
  - treaties and conventions and summits

Yet increased participation in itself does not alter power, nor change the status quo.
How do we assess the transformative potential of new democratic spaces?

What are the possibilities of effective, pro-poor citizen action?

- Whose spaces?
- What levels of power?
- What dimensions of power?

The Power Cube – a tentative approach
Closed or uninvited spaces:
bureaucrats, experts, elected representative make decisions
with little broad consultation or involvement

Closed/uninvited

SPACES for participation
Invited Spaces:

*People are invited to participate by various kinds of authorities*
Claimed/Created Spaces:
Spaces claimed by less powerful actors from or against the power holders, or created more autonomously by them

Closed/Uninvited  Invited  Claimed/Created

SPACES for participation
# PLACES of participation

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global</th>
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- Closed/
- Invited
- Claimed/
- Uninvited
- Created

**SPACES**
POWER relationships

PLACES

Global
National
Local

SPACES

Closed/ Uninvited  Invited  Claimed/ Created
Visible: Contests over interests are assumed to be visible in public spaces, which are presumed to be relatively open.
Hidden: barriers preclude the entry of certain actors and issues

PLACES
- Global
- National
- Local

POWER
- Visible
- Hidden

SPACES
- Closed/uninvited
- Invited
- Claimed/Created
Invisible:
Visible conflict is hidden through internalisation of powerlessness or lack of awareness
Inverting the cube –
Seeing power through different lens
Lessons from using the Power Approach – Civil Society Evaluation

- A valuable approach for reflection with civil society groups
- An approach, not a static tool – don’t tick the boxes!
- Open-ended and popular uses
## Spaces for poverty policy in Nigeria: Multiple but disconnected

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Official (Closed) Spaces</th>
<th>Invited Spaces</th>
<th>Created Spaces</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>External</strong></td>
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<td>Donor policies</td>
<td>Donor-civil society dialogue</td>
<td>Global social movements (oil; debt)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National</strong></td>
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<td>National Poverty Program</td>
<td>PRSP’s</td>
<td>National trade unions; rights organisations</td>
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<td><strong>State</strong></td>
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<td>e.g. Jigawa State Poverty Policy</td>
<td>Jigawa State Peoples’ Congress</td>
<td>Emirate and youth structures</td>
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<td><strong>LGA/Community</strong></td>
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<td>Local government councils</td>
<td>Parallel structures – Emirates Oil companies</td>
<td>Zakkat committees; Home town Associations; youth movements</td>
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Power in advocacy campaigns –
Aligning our strategies
Increasing the rights of citizens to have power over their own lives requires change at every level and aspect of the power cube.

Strategies for mobilisation and action should

✓ connect across all the spaces
  – but how do civil society actors build alliances across the spaces and strategies?

✓ link vertically, as well as horizontally
  – who represents whom across the levels? How are actors in one space held accountable?

✓ address the hidden and invisible forms of power in every space and level
  – does ‘professional’ campaigning at one level re-enforce hidden and invisible forms of power at another?