

# FROM 'EMPOWERMENT' TO 'TRANSFORMING POWER': CAN A POWER ANALYSIS IMPROVE DEVELOPMENT POLICY, PRACTICE AND IMPACT?\*

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## Introduction

The millennium goals have focused development practitioners more than ever before on eight key goals which range from halving economic poverty to the provision of universal primary education by 2015<sup>1</sup>. There are multiple reasons why, despite progress in these goals, there are serious risks that they will not be met in many parts of the global South<sup>2</sup>. Many international development actors recognise that technical interventions and increased resources are insufficient mechanisms for achieving development goals. In the course of the 1990s, they turned to 'agents for change', such as civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations to improve service delivery and the accountability of states to citizens, as well as to deepen democracy and secure pro-poor development. The idea of development, promoted by many international non-governmental agencies, as a right and not a need has also focused attention on rights claiming as a mechanism for shifting state policy priorities towards the poorest and most vulnerable of the population.

A sense, however, that even civil society organisations have not 'delivered' on expectations has emerged amongst bilateral and multilateral organisations. Civil society strengthening often became yet another 'technical tool' of development rather than a partnership with change agents which would always be complex because such change agents are embedded in messy and diverse social realities<sup>3</sup>. Impact measurement, often consisting of fairly meaningless quantitative data, substituted for systematic learning from practice and overwhelmed the less formal civil society organisations. Without convincing evidence of impact, however, some bilateral and multilateral organisations are seeking to re-orientate aid programmes towards support for national development programmes and the state<sup>4</sup>. There are dangers that we will swing from state-led to civil society-led development and now back to the state and national development strategies. However, effective states need effective civil societies; it is the synergies between the two which need to be built. But the arguments for working appropriately with civil society organisations need still to be made and the evidence gathered. How do civil society organisations

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<sup>1</sup> Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, develop a global partnership for development.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations (2005) *Millennium Development Goals 2005* New York: United Nations.

<sup>3</sup> J. Howell and J. Pearce (2001) *Civil Society and Development: A critical exploration*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

<sup>4</sup> OECD Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of 2 March 2005.

make states accountable to citizens, and ensure that poverty eradication and sustainable development become the driving force of national and global policy?

A group of evaluators for five Dutch Co-Financing Agencies (CFAs) were given the opportunity in 2005 to look in detail at the participation of civil society organisations. In other words, what is the point of 'strengthening civil society'? What do civil society organisations do? How do they enable the poor and the marginalised to make their voices heard and to have impact on policies? Our framework for this evaluation came from the IDS Citizenship, Participation and Accountability Group. It located civil society participation within the spaces, places and levels of engagement of each context, and recognised three kinds of power (visible, invisible and hidden) in all of these, a framework known as the "power cube"<sup>5</sup>. The subsequent study of five countries (Colombia, Guinea, Guatemala, Sri Lanka and Uganda), showed that through their funding, the CFAs were "making a vital contribution to participatory action in the South that tackles persistent inequitable power relations."<sup>6</sup> However, it concluded that there was a "lack of systematic reflection and analysis (of power) of CFAs and their partners and between them. This limits the extent to which partner organizations can use political spaces effectively and strategically"<sup>7</sup>. How can building a more explicit focus on power into CFA programming help the CFAs to re-strategise and enhance the capacity of partner CSOs to more effectively influence decision-making across their domains of change action? What difference might it make to the impact of CFA programmes? And how could CFAs maintain the resolve of bilateral and multilateral donors as well as national governments to protect the space for civil society participation as an essential component for delivering the millennium goals and ultimately eradicating poverty?

This presentation offers a first step towards exploring these questions. It will argue that knowing when to 'talk to the powerful', when to 'challenge the powerful', and when to 'confront the powerful', requires a strong understanding of the character of power in particular spaces and structures. It requires change agents to navigate their way through the structures of power to find the contingent possibilities for effecting particular policy changes at the same time as they transform structures and promote a transition from dominating to non dominating forms of power. An explicit power analysis could improve the tactical use of multiple spaces; nurture ways of learning from practice in order to adapt to the ebbs and flow of power relations without losing direction; improve mutual trust across and between the CSO and CFA worlds where some organisations have more access to some spaces than others and encourage more systematic thinking on how change is achieved. It could also develop sensitivity to the way we often unthinkingly reproduce the dominating forms of power embedded in the social structures of society to such an extent that they become normal and unquestioned.

The presentation will draw on the CFA evaluation study to illustrate some benefits from a more conscious use of power analysis to participatory action and to raise questions for further discussion and reflection. It will then explore a little further the available 'tools for thinking' on power. Many development organisations have relied on the concept of 'empowerment' to understand power. However,

<sup>5</sup> J. Gaventa (2005) *Reflections on the Uses of the 'Power Cube' Approach for Analysing the Spaces, Places and Dynamics of Civil Society Participation and Engagement* mimeo. The categories were expanded during the evaluation, as the Cube is not a representation of power, but an analytical tool for empirical testing. Jenny Pearce from the Department of Peace Studies, University Bradford, added violence to the Cube, as most of the case study countries were embroiled in various stages of violence conflict. J. Pearce (2004) *Assessing Civil Society Participation: War and Post War Contexts*, mimeo.

<sup>6</sup> I. Guijt (2005) *Synthesis Report of Dutch CFA evaluation*. mimeo: ii.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid: iii.

'empowerment' is arguably not a sharp enough tool for addressing the way dominating power restricts action for change and the different and particular ways it does this; nor does it help us to think through what kind of power would generate pro-poor development; nor does it tackle the way the poor and their allies can reproduce dominating power in their own social relationships. How can a greater consciousness of dominating power and a new conceptualisation of transforming, non dominating power, enhance the effectiveness of civil society organisations in all the spaces, levels and places in which they seek to bring about change?

### **The Power Cube<sup>8</sup> and Civil Society Participation**

The five country/four CFA evaluation of civil society participation explored how "CFA policies, strategies and procedures increase and strengthen the participation of citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) in decision-making processes and create and re-enforce conditions to this effect?"<sup>9</sup> Following the field evaluation, it identified **six domains** in which civil society organisations might effectively play a role in progressing:

- Citizenship strengthening which enhances consciousness about rights and rights claim making;
- Citizenship participation in CSO governance and practice to enhance CSO accountability to the poor and marginalised;
- Citizen participation in local development and service delivery;
- Citizen/CSO participation in advocacy and structural change;
- Citizen participation in economic life;
- Trust, dignity, culture and identity which is about encouraging mutually respectful social relationships.

The evaluation generated some rich data and this can only be appreciated by reading the full synthesis. In this presentation, I want to concentrate on what we learnt about power and change through using the power cube analytical framework. I will briefly summarise the three dimensions of the cube:

**Spaces** from the point of view of civil society participation was understood in terms of "opportunities, moment channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives and interests"<sup>10</sup>. Such spaces can take a number of forms. Gaventa identifies three, although the field evaluations expanded on these. Closed spaces are where decisions are made "behind the scenes", sometimes with the aim of "providing" for the people but with no participation of the people. Invited spaces are where efforts are made to open up spaces by inviting people (as users, citizens, beneficiaries) into the space for consultation or in a more institutionalised form. Claimed or created spaces are those where the less powerful create their own autonomous spaces. They include spaces created by social movements and community associations, or just spaces where people "gather to debate, discuss and resist, outside of the institutionalised policy arenas".

Space must be located, and the second dimension of the cube is the **levels and places** where different spaces are contextually rooted. Gaventa (2005) identified the global, national and local places. In the course of the evaluation, these were

<sup>8</sup> We will continue to speak of the 'power' cube, although violence adds dimensions to it that are vital if we are to understand limits to participation. This is part of ongoing work.

<sup>9</sup> I. Guijt (2005: iii).

<sup>10</sup> J. Gaventa (2005) *Reflections on the Uses of the Power Cube Approach for Analysing the Spaces, Places and Dynamics of Civil Society Participation and Engagement*, mimeo v.

unpacked and expanded in some countries to include region, village, neighbourhood, and the impact of the private and intimate spaces on the public spaces was recognised.

Andrea Cornwall<sup>11</sup> had drawn on the work of various theorists of space to argue that space is not empty and neutral, but “a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control, and hence of domination, of power”<sup>12</sup>. The third dimension of the cube is the form of **power in the space**. Gaventa identified three kinds of power: Visible power, which is the observable and formal forms of power, the rules, structures, authorities, institutions and procedures of decision-making. Hidden power, is the way certain powerful people and institutions maintain their influence by controlling who is invited to the decision-making arena and what gets on the agenda. Invisible power shapes the “psychological and ideological boundaries of participation. Significant problems and issues are not only kept from the decision-making table, but also from the minds and consciousness of the different players involved, even those directly affected by the problem.”<sup>13</sup>

Each of our five countries chosen for the evaluation has its own culture of civil society organisations and state, historical processes and structures and forms of dominating power. Participation in most countries was impeded by various forms of violence. The evaluation demonstrated an enormous range of civil society organisation activity in neighbourhood, community, village, municipality, region/department, national and global levels, in multiple spaces and with potential impacts across the six domains.

In **Colombia**, with a long history of social movement activism, decentralisation in the late 1980s and the Constitution of 1991 opened up new opportunities for CSO and citizen participation, which were seized despite the ongoing violence and fear in the country. Our power cube analysis made it clear that a lot of these were invited spaces where all forms (visible, invisible and hidden) of dominating power were still operating and limiting the change possible within them. Political leaders might invite CSOs to participate but they hung onto their formal, visible roles which made it difficult to challenge them; or they used less visible clientelist brokerage power relations to divide people, or they enjoyed the hidden structural power which wealth and education gives in order to ensure that some issues could never be brought to the table. Colombian CSOs showed great creativity in moving between all the spaces and across the levels and developing a range of goals aimed at enhancing pro-poor outcomes<sup>14</sup>. They ensured that some issues, such as human rights, violence against women and children, workers rights, which would otherwise not get on the agenda, were put on it. The nationally oriented organisations were often strengthened and protected by global networks which helped keep spaces open which might otherwise close. Those working at the very local level, could be strengthened by alliances and networks across localities and nationally.

Colombia’s CSOs are a vital guarantor for civil voices in a context where power as well as violence silences. But could they be more effective in challenging the power structures of Colombia? Despite all this activity, one interview claimed “A lot of

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<sup>11</sup> A. Cornwall (2002) *Making Spaces, Changing Places: Situating Participation in Development*, IDS Working Paper 170.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid: 24

<sup>13</sup> Gaventa, 2005: 9.

<sup>14</sup> Decision-making, debate, building agreements, influence, interlocution, lobbying, protest, accountability, making visible, pressure, articulation, follow up, formation of public opinion, scrutiny and recommendation, resistance, proposal, negotiation, peace-building, complaint, encounter, and mobilisation.

participation, not much change". There was a sense that getting decisions made in favour of the poor was still an elusive goal. Many CSOs resort to creating spaces, given this difficulty, and mistrust and suspicion have made many withdraw from invited spaces where no change comes out of their actions. Sometimes, new spaces are created from above, for example by institutions such as the Church, and sometimes from below, such as by the rubbish recyclers who invited decision makers to their conference to discuss the impact of privatisation on their livelihoods. The evaluators felt that invited spaces could be used better by CSOs, if they analysed better the character of the power relations in each space. This might require better capacities to argue and dialogue. But also, they felt that the CSOs often reproduced the non democratic nature and power inequalities embedded in Colombian social life, within their own organisations. The evaluation highlighted the problem of creating a participatory culture amongst Colombia's civil society organisations, where power could be distributed in more horizontal ways. This is because of the less visible as well as visible ways power is exercised, structured social power embedded in history and culture. Gender power inequalities are one expression of this. A feminist CSO had understood the importance of addressing this structured social power and thinking about power differently:

*"Women must ask themselves, do they want to replicate exclusionary practices or encourage other types of political practices? Participation is about developing the commonality in our needs and how to negotiate individual and collective needs. Do we come together to put forward our needs or do we want to be exclusionary? Our proposals are not just for women, but for our families, for everyone. What type of political practices do we want to build? How do we not repeat other practices, including those amongst women? Power is denied us, how do we recognise the power of others? I don't know whether we have an alternative idea of power. We work on subjectivities. I cannot be democratic if I don't construct myself as a democratic subject. How as women do we build more democratic subjects? How do I find a balance between my personal interests and my collective interests? We need to reflect on new practices. This is a slow process. Families and schools are very authoritarian. We come from anti-democratic communities and the Church too. There is little acceptance of differences. We are very fundamentalist, left and right."*<sup>15</sup>

In **Guatemala**, civil society organisations are much more fragile than in Colombia, and deeply fragmented by ethnicity, class and gender. The poor are systematically excluded from participation in Guatemala, despite the emergence of 'invited spaces' with the 1996 Peace Accords. Civil society strengthening by external donors, particularly multilateral and bilateral agencies, failed to recognise the complexity of the different forms of dominating power and how they systematically exclude indigenous men and women from participation. Funding of urban NGOs, tended to create a layer of professionalized organisations which had few connections to the most powerless, and found it very difficult to engage the powerful. This is particularly so as the most powerful actors are increasingly illegal and clandestine mafias behind the weak state, making it difficult to determine where to lobby and advocate at the state level. Some organisations have become adept at trying to use spaces, however, but mistrust abounds. The risks to life are also real. The strategy of strengthening grassroots organisations, particularly women and indigenous groups, and women indigenous has been an astute one by the CFA we evaluated in Guatemala. It has enabled the poorest sectors to create their own spaces of participation and in the process a sense of their own protagonism. One Mayan

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<sup>15</sup> Personal interview, Casa de la Mujer, Bogotá, 1 April 2005.

women's group, Maya Kaq'la had gained a great understanding of invisible power through its work, the power that prevents people from feeling they can participate:

*"Why do we not speak now when we were parrots when we were children? We have internalised repressions, They gave us words: 'stupid, you can't, you don't know, poor thing you are a woman'. And then through our bodies and energy, especially if you have brothers who go out to play and you remain in the kitchen."*

*"I am from a family of four women, but my father would have liked us to be boys. I lived in the anguish of not being valued...I had to move my life forward with much energy and build my space and reconstruct my life because it was blocked and contaminated."*

CFA funding has helped the poorest to go through processes where they can begin to think of themselves as protagonists in the broader public sphere. The challenge is how to nurture the transition to such protagonism. In a weak state and socially fragmented context, trust amongst CSOs is one of the victims. Greater analytical capacity around the forms of dominating power might enhance the self-reflection and tactical astuteness that could build more CSO alliances, better relationships between urban professionals and popular activists, and greater sensitivity to the internalised powerlessness of many indigenous men and particularly women.

**Guinea** also has a very adverse context for civil society organisations, who have a relatively recent history. Decentralisation processes initiated in the mid 1980s should have opened up spaces for CSOs, but the evaluators found that relatively little power had been transferred from the national level. War-related violence, corruption, and a certain 'fatalism', have all limited CSO actions. A more modern CSO sector has emerged, and external donors have supported them in struggles against corruption, for instance. A great deal of suspicion exists between them and the state. CSOs often focus on service delivery roles, but do not link service delivery to the importance of claims to the state and to issues of power and empowerment. This meant that they often substitute for the state without building an effective and accountable state. The evaluation synthesis highlighted the importance of putting service delivery within a power analysis, as claiming provision "is itself a political act of rights realization. Therefore a critical component in service delivery is how the poor, marginalized and vulnerable (and their organizations) participate in defining needs and priorities, ensuring access to and quality of services, and collaborative service provision."<sup>16</sup>

In **Sri Lanka**, recognition by governments around the end of the 1970s that CSOs and international NGOs are important in development and poverty alleviation led to most CSO participation centering around invited spaces. However, ethnic conflicts in the 1980s generated organisational developments around rights protection especially for ethnically, geographically and economically marginalised groups. Much of CSO participation since then has been around claiming spaces rather than policy advocacy. Similar to Guatemala, this has enabled the most marginalised to overcome embedded powerlessness:

*"For groups that have been severely marginalized, leading to a lack of self-confidence or an engrained submissiveness the creation of claimed spaces in which for example plantation women can start building self-confidence,*

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<sup>16</sup> Guijt, op. cit: 41.

*literacy, public speaking capacity and knowing their rights is a successful first step towards civil society participation for these groups.*<sup>17</sup>

How can this greater self-confidence be translated into a capacity and influence at the decision-making levels where dominating power prevails? The evaluation team also highlighted the importance of getting deeper into the area of trust and identity in Sri Lanka, the sixth domain. The power differentials which divide people on ethnic lines need to be addressed within society as well as at the level of claim making. This is an area of civil society participation which needs strengthening.

**Uganda's** CSOs have been greatly weakened by protracted violence and conflict; many in the heartlands of conflict in the North in particular, still concentrate on emergency relief and service delivery rather than state accountability and human rights advocacy. Most CSOs are locally based community – based, informal organisations. However, in recent years, an increasing number of advocacy CSOs have emerged mainly working at the national level. They have been gaining confidence to question government on the direction of development policy. However, their capacity to engage the state remains weak. The educated elite have captured many CSOS, leading to power differentials amongst CSOs themselves. Weak analytical capacity has limited the linkages built between locality and the national level, between micro and macro issues. The sector is very dependent on external funding and very vulnerable to a state that wishes to control and limit their activities.

The evaluation generally applauded the contribution of the CFAs to participatory action in the South that can tackle persistent, inequitable power relations, strengthen the voice of 'forgotten social groups', raise taboo subjects, encourage CSOs to move between levels and spaces and build networks. This was uneven across the countries and between CFAs, so generalisation is difficult. However, evidence suggested that CSOs in the South could become *much more effective* participants and change agents if they could analyse the way different forms of dominating power operate within and across spaces and levels and use this to develop ongoing learning from practice. A CFA-CSO learning partnership could develop systematic reflection and monitoring of how change agents use spaces and cope with the different ways power operates within them, while simultaneously analysing their own power relations with other change agents.

I will take an example from each of the countries which I know best, Colombia and Guatemala. In Colombia, I will take an example from the work of Plan International Colombia, which is funded by Plan Netherlands, and in Guatemala, I will take an example from the work of Madre Selva, a CSO funded by Hivos. These examples are intended to be illustrative of the theme of the presentation *not of the overall work of these CFAs in question*. The examples are chosen as Plan International is in the process of a transition from an assistance to an empowerment programme, whereas Hivos has a long history of grassroots empowerment work. The examples illustrate the potential for greater effectiveness to both if they worked with partners to systematically analyse how power is impacting on the changes they are trying to induce and how such analysis can help with future actions for change. Both examples are taken from countries where civil society participation is fraught with dangers not just from the abuse of power but from the use of violence by private and state actors. They are therefore at the extreme end of the problems facing civil society organisations in the global South.

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<sup>17</sup> Country Study of Sri Lanka, 2005: 41.

In Colombia, Fundimur in Sincelejo is working in the 22 poor urban and rural neighbourhoods of the municipality (where most of the population live), centred around the child sponsorship programme and addressing community needs as a way of enhancing the quality of life of children, such as improvement of schools. Plan International's transition towards an empowerment focus involves a new emphasis on training with women and children around children's rights, sexual and reproductive health. This is the Woman, Family and Community programme. The participatory dimensions of the work are not around the public space, but more about the dissemination of a rights discourse which could strengthen the dignity of the family and the community. Its weaknesses are in the strategic linkages to the context of Sincelejo. Trust and the pursuit of the public good have been deeply eroded by violence and paramilitary control in Sincelejo; the social fabric has been very severely torn. Fundimur has some good promoters, who are very aware of the problems of the municipality. They do not, however, have a permanent dialogue with Plan International Colombia personnel in the municipality. This weakens the capacity to develop the linkages which could enable Plan to strengthen the capacity of the communities it works with to participate in the public realm. At present, Plan International Colombia still appears to be the participatory subject of Sincelejo around its programme goals rather than the communities it works with.

A field visit to the *vereda* (village) of 2,500 people, 500 houses, known as La Gallera demonstrated this point. The village is an indigenous *resguardo*, in one of the two rural zones where Plan International Colombia works in Sincelejo. The understanding of participation which underpins the work with the community remains limited, and centres mostly on individual empowerment and training rather than capacity to dialogue or negotiate with authorities. The community had many problems, including unemployment and land ("It is easier to go to heaven after a life full of sin than to obtain a piece of land"<sup>18</sup>, they told us). Plan International was helping the community to develop its Local Development Plan, centred on children, but it is Plan itself which presents it to the municipality and tries to get it inserted into the Municipal Development Plan. The community believed that the administration would listen to Plan because they have resources (i.e. power). Their own opinion of municipal politics is very negative: "The politicians don't come and say: well, I am going to give you this or that for the community, no, they say I am going to give you this for your vote."

A learning partnership could enable an analysis of the power relations between Plan International Colombia, Fundimur and the villagers. In order for Plan International Colombia to enable the villagers to effectively engage *themselves* with the powerful in Sincelejo, they need to talk about the intersections between violence and power in Sincelejo; they need to take this into account when trying to access the municipal administration and minimise risks to life. They need to gain a tactical sense of where opportunities open up, through for example invited spaces, where support could be given to villagers in terms of how to make claims and build support networks with other indigenous groups and peasants at the local, regional and other levels.

Our second example is Madre Selva, a small group of committed catalytic agents who define themselves as "a collective: a citizen group who have organised themselves to participate actively, peacefully and ethically"<sup>19</sup> in protecting the environment, and who have turned a key issue into one of citizen debate and concern. On 24 August 2005, the High Level Mining Commission agreed on a

<sup>18</sup> Interview, villagers of El Gallero, Sincelejo, 2 April 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Madre Selva Madre Selva (2003), 'En defensa de la Tierra, nuestra herencia común. Plan de Trabajo 2003-2005', Programme document, Guatemala, February 2003.

fundamental framework for mining activities and ordered that no new mining licences be granted until the Mining Law is reformed. These recommendations would then go to the President. In the context of Guatemala, even if this is accepted, implementation will not be guaranteed. Repression and intimidation will still surround activities to monitor the exploitation of natural resources in Guatemala. The indigenous communities have been awoken to the issue and are aware that the integrity of their lands is under threat from the powerful economic interests of the country and internationally. The struggle around oil in the Peten is likely to be more intense. Madre Selva fears the violence which could be unleashed in the future as peasants become more aware of their rights in an area of high stakes where the government will be prepared to use repression as it does in other areas, and this makes creative ways of engaging the powerful and influencing decisions more urgent:

*"We do not have doctorates in mining, but we are human beings. We do not lie. We have a proven credibility. We are courageous. We can begin something, but we do not have a way to confront the style of power here. ...I am afraid that there will be more violence at a certain moment, we are dealing with oil, mines, water, African Palm..."<sup>20</sup>*

Madre Selva has combined a range of strategies at different levels and spaces to achieve change, from organising its own parallel forum to that of the World Bank to participating in a high level dialogue.<sup>21</sup> It has helped people to understand they have rights in the natural resource question in a country where the elite has never recognised that the country belongs to other people than themselves. They have ensured that the World Bank itself is forced to respect procedures. In the spaces it has occupied at the different levels and at different times.

Madre Selva recognises that it has evolved over time from a 'conservationist' organisation to taking a more radical position in response to failures of the state to protect the environment and to be transparent about natural resource policies. Its strategies have evolved accordingly, including a stronger emphasis on 'social accompaniment' and 'resistance', in alliance with other civil society organisations and social movements. At the core of its approach is a commitment to accompaniment, and to supporting those processes "in which people decide to participate" in the protection of the environment<sup>22</sup>.

In order to pursue these strategies, MS acknowledges that Hivos recognition and respect for their autonomy has been critical:

*"Hivos is not so formal, so that it gives us more flexibility to be creative"<sup>23</sup>*

Hivos is accompanying them through a difficult period of internal reorganisation in the functioning of the collective, and to strengthen their ties with social movements. However, they are aware of the lack of time to systematise their experiences. They have taken steps to improve this and the administrative capacity, bringing in advisors to help them with this. This is clearly an area which they wish to improve on. They are also looking to greater institutionalisation of their role, through the opening up of an ecologist consciousness and reflection

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with MRR, 22 August 2005.

<sup>21</sup> (Madre Selva, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with MRR, 22 August 2005.

centre, aimed at increasing their own learning and that of others. They particularly wish to increase the capacity of local mayors to build an environmental agenda.<sup>24</sup>

In the case of MS, the CFA has played a very important role in supporting the efforts of this small organisation to participate in a range of spaces. But MS themselves recognise that to be more effective, they need to constantly reflect on their learning and on when and why they should work in some spaces rather than others, and how they could open spaces for the poorest to engage with the powerful. Dominating power and violence are huge obstacles to pro-poor change agendas in Guatemala. A learning partnership around power between the CFA and the CSO could help ensure that tactics are subjected to reflection and aligned with objectives, so that it is clear when the creation of spaces through mobilisation could be more effective than sitting in the invited spaces of the state, or when the two could be combined.

Civil society participation not only enhances capacity to defend the rights of the poorest, but also capacity to take appropriate and measured action based on good analysis of the structures of power and processes of economic accumulation, enabling alliances to be built amongst people with tactical differences but strategic commonalities, and thus contributing to 'citizenship participation' and the greater prospects for pro-poor change.

### **From Empowerment to Transforming Power: Tools for CFA Re-strategising around Power**

The civil society participation evaluation generated a number of issues and questions which should be discussed as a means of reflecting on how a power analysis could help to re-strategise CFA engagement with CSOs. Below are some of the key points:

- Civil society participation keeps issues on the agenda, and ensures voices are heard in contexts where they would otherwise be systematically silenced. However, translating this into more effective decision-making influence is much harder. People with a history of internalised powerlessness do not easily make the transition to invited rather than claimed spaces, where the frustrations can be great.
- How do CSOs learn the 'craft of talking to the powerful'? And if they learn it, how do they ensure the poorest and more marginal do as well, or that trust between organisations is such that suspicion is not created when CSOs speak 'for the poor'?
- Many are fearful of talking to the powerful, and this fear needs to be factored into strategic planning if participation is to reach the least powerful and not just professional representatives. A young woman working with a Guatemalan CSO training electoral observer, spoke about the importance of overcoming fear of the powerful:

*"Some people from Caldh arrived to choose some young people, and it interested me, as a way I could lose my fear towards important people, and also share something with other young people...the authorities do not see us as people with capacity to take on a big responsibility. The experience was very good, when they saw us with our jacket (of electoral observers), we had visibility and were seen as people with authority. We were there all day*

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<sup>24</sup> Madre Selva, 2003.

*from 7.00 am to after 10 at night, because we wanted people to participate in the elections. I learnt a lot”.*

- In many contexts, the difficulties of prising open closed spaces, or making effective use of invited spaces, means that creating spaces is one of the only means to influence decision-making. How can these efforts be combined?
- Some organisations in some contexts are better able to analyse invisible power than in others. An assumption cannot be made that if a space has been opened up to invitation, it is a genuinely participatory space. A nuanced power analysis is important if a long-term sense that you are powerless is to be overcome.
- A greater understanding of the different dimensions of dominating power helps CSOs to analyse the spaces of participation better and to determine where best to focus their efforts. If a CSO is clear that visible power is not the only kind of power which limits them, but can analyse the invisible power networks which lie behind the formal structures, they can better use the invited spaces. They will have a better understanding of what can and cannot be changed.
- Changing the priorities and policies of a government is a very slow, risky and frustrating experience. It is for this reason that a willingness to know tactically as well as strategically which spaces for participation are worth being in and when to withdraw from them and create a new space is very key to effective action. Civil society participation will be about long-term processes of change; strong analytical capacity is important if CSOs are going to respond to fast changing environments, the ebbs and flows of opportunities and to keep focused on the broader goals of pro-poor development.
- Poor service delivery often reflects the powerlessness of certain groups. Some advocacy groups or more rights claiming groups might not see the importance to power shifts for winning better service provision. This is again about understanding the way dominating power operates in a society, ensuring that some groups are able to gain access to services due only to the power they command over others.
- The evaluation team found a very uneven response to gender inequality, from ‘fragile to strong’. It was evident that much remains to be done for CSOs to strengthen the participation of women, but also to strategically to use this to challenge gender inequalities.
- The question of gender raises the issue of how power is understood within society, not just power in terms of emanating from the state and from ‘a source’. A stronger power analysis would enable CSOs to deal better not only with class and gender power differentials, but also with ethnicity and identity. They could become more self-reflective on how they reproduce dominating power in their practice and begin therefore to reflect on alternative forms of non dominating power which could engage more people, build more alliances and overcome divisions, and create stronger horizontal civil networks aimed at changing the norms and priorities of society as a whole as well as the state.

Such questions emerging from empirical investigation need to be complemented by conceptual tools that help us think more sharply about power. What tools do we have to help us strengthen our power analysis? It might be argued, that ‘empowerment’ as a concept covers much of the ground of dealing with the power that creates the sense of powerlessness. Empowerment has been an important idea for development practitioners for some time. However, the concept has lost a lot of

adherents in recent years as it has been appropriated by mainstream development agencies. Should we move 'beyond empowerment'?

Empowerment has been important in drawing attention to the way individuals often feel a lack of power and are inhibited in taking on roles as change agents or talking to the powerful. Although its original meanings drew attention to collective rights claiming, it is this individual meaning that appealed to agencies such as the World Bank, who were looking to enhance the capabilities of the poor in the market place as well as in relation to the state. But the concept did lead to new understandings of alternative meanings of power, that contain the seeds of what I will call transforming power, understood as adjective and transitive verb. The ideas of *power with*, *power to*, *power within* grew out of the empowerment debate and they all challenge dominating power or *power over* others.

However, attention did not focus on strengthening these other views of power, but rather on the self-strength, reliance etc of individuals. A World Bank study of empowerment listed the ideas associated with empowerment as amongst others: "self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, life of dignity in accordance with one's values, capacity to fight for one's rights, independence, own decision-making, being free, awakening and capability"<sup>25</sup>. These individualised understandings have their role. But for the purposes of building a world in which poverty eradication and sustainable development are to become the natural priorities of society, something more is required.

For this reason, I prefer Mark Haugaard's definition of empowerment as the "creation of a capacity for action (power to) with respect to new issue areas"<sup>26</sup>. In Haugaard's discussion of how power (over) is created and a social order emerges, he argues that the reproducing of social structures as meaningful is one of the key mechanisms. Most people come to recognise certain social structures, not through any self-reflection or analysis, but through the sense of regularity and normality they produce. People tacitly confirm them. Haugaard's argument is that we have to develop the kind of critical consciousness that enables us to stop confirming unequal power structures as merely part of a given 'social order'. This he calls a 'discursive consciousness', where people develop a critical awareness of the oppressive nature of power structures and their right and capacity to challenging them. This critical awareness can support new forms of agency, as no longer do people treat existing power relationships as inevitable. This in turn, can result in new priorities as society opens to issues and possibilities that have been kept off the agenda by the powerful. It encourages change agents to look at the way power relationships become structured and how dominating power, as Steven Lukes points out, can have three dimensions, "the exercise of getting one's way, power to decide what is decided and thus excluding issues and grievances from reaching the political arena, and the power which shapes and constructs peoples":

*"perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial."*<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> D. Narayan (2001) *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Source book* Washington: World Bank, pgs 13-14.

<sup>26</sup> M. Haugaard (2003) 'Reflections of Seven Ways of Creating Power', *European Journal of Social Theory* 6 (1), pg 95.

<sup>27</sup> S. Lukes (2005) *Power : A Radical View*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 28.

A critical awareness of this, and a capacity to analyse its effects *with others*, or a 'discursive consciousness', could enable us to recognise dominating power and to find a new theory of power, of transforming power, which can address it. Such a theory must, I would argue, take on board the fact that power does not just emanate but circulates, as Michel Foucault has argued. This enables people to understand how we can reproduce dominating power in our own relationships even if we are resisting the dominating power of others. Poor, powerless men can subjugate poor women and gain some power relative to them. New forms of non dominating power are as important therefore to 'empowerment' as individual self-discovery.

'Empowerment', a 'discursive consciousness of power' and the exploration of new forms of 'non dominating transforming power', are some components of a stronger power analysis which might help CFAs to enhance the impact of CSO participation and its ultimate goals of poverty eradication and sustainable development. These thinking tools could help the CFAs to re-strategise their relationships with CSOs, build learning partnerships based on systematic, evidence based reflection on practice and strategies rather than lists of outputs and targets. This could help us overcome the rapid adoption and abandonment of concepts in development thinking, such as 'civil society strengthening', and deepen our understanding of their practical contribution to the urgent goals of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

## Foroaod – Spanish Development Aid

FRIDE organised the project "Spanish Development Aid - Mid-term Review and a Proposal for a Participative Consultation" between June 2006 and April 2007. This project aims to develop a consultation process about the current Spanish government's development cooperation policy. We have created a forum for participation and debate, in order to assess the Spanish development cooperation reform agenda and to identify the main achievements and shortcomings in operationalising the initiatives based on the principle of "More Aid, Better Aid". A set of recommendation guidelines were developed, through participative methods, with the objective of putting into practice the aspirations of the Spanish development cooperation policy.

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