

**No more adoption rates!**

**Looking for empowerment in  
agricultural development programmes**



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## Looking for empowerment in agricultural development programmes

*“Power can be taken, but not given. The process of the taking is empowerment in itself”.* Gloria Steinem

### 1. What’s going on?

Mr Ganga Ram Neupane is a rice farmer in Jhapa District of Nepal. In 1999 he attended a Farmer Field School (FFS) where he learnt about integrated pest management. As a result, his yields increased by approximately 30%. Costs were the same as in earlier years; he spent more on compost and certified seed, but saved money by eliminating the use of pesticides<sup>1</sup>.

The FFS attended by Mr Neupane was conducted by officials from the Plant Protection Department with support from FAO. The benefits, in terms of increased yields and reduced use of pesticide, were anticipated in the project document. What is equally interesting, however, are the activities and the outcomes that were *not* planned.

Mr Neupane discussed the benefits of IPM with other farmers. The Chairman of the Village Development Committee (VDC) decided to organise another Field School using VDC funds to pay for snacks, with Mr Neupane as a trainer. Mr Neupane subsequently organised FFS in a number of villages, travelling nearly 20 km on his bicycle to conduct sessions.

Mrs Damanta Bimauli, another rice farmer in Jhapa, was not invited to a FFS but she decided to ‘gate-crash’ the sessions in a neighbouring village. Back in her own village she started a number of experiments to compare different types and rates of fertilizer, and she formed a group of farmers to discuss community issues. The group was interested in health, not just agriculture, and they played an active role in a polio awareness campaign.

The Plant Protection Department has responded to these developments by organising workshops for Farmer Trainers. This has led to further initiatives by IPM farmers. Mr Neupane and Mrs Bimauli are now members of the Jhapa IPM Association, an organisation that is run by farmers and which is linking up with similar associations in other Districts. The association in Jhapa plans and organises its own training activities, and negotiates the support required from the Department of Agriculture and Local Government Units.

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<sup>1</sup> The details in this section are taken from Andrew Bartlett, 2002, ‘Farmer in Action: How IPM training is transforming the role of farmers in Nepal’s agricultural development’, FAO

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## 2. Empowerment and agricultural development

“Empowerment means that people, especially poorer people, are enabled to take more control over their lives”<sup>2</sup>. This idea has been an important element in political thought and educational practice for more than a hundred years, but has only become a significant part of the agenda for agricultural development during the past two decades.

Why have agricultural scientists, project managers and extension workers started talking about empowerment? Unlike political scientists, who may understand empowerment as the realisation of human rights, or educational practitioners, who may be interested in the connection between empowerment and epistemology, it seems that many agricultural development professionals are promoting the idea of empowerment - in a somewhat contradictory manner - as a means for modernisation.

In agriculture, empowerment is often seen as the next step in the trend away from ‘technology transfer’ and towards increased participation, involving the diffusion – not just of ideas – but of expertise. As an advanced form of participation, empowerment entails farmers making their own decisions rather than adopting recommendations. It is expected that expert farmers will make ‘better’ decisions than outside experts, and this will result in farming systems with a higher degree of productivity, efficiency, sustainability, and equity. In short, empowerment is a *means* for the achievement of goals that have been set by governments and donors, not an *end* in itself.

Rather than being the expression of any kind of liberation movement, as is the case with women’s empowerment or the empowerment of indigenous people, the empowerment of farmers is often seen as a way of enhancing the effectiveness of projects and programmes that are planned and managed by the political and technical elite. This instrumental view of empowerment involves farmers taking greater control of livelihood assets in a way that is both predictable and non-threatening for other sections of society.

## 3. It’s all about agency

Where is the contradiction in the instrumental view of empowerment? The answer rests in the difference between farmers being *given* a greater role in *our* agenda, which we can call ‘participation’, and them *taking* control of their *own* agenda, which is what ‘empowerment’ is really about. This distinction is – perhaps – an unfair simplification of the wide range of opinions and methods that are associated with participatory approaches in agricultural development<sup>3</sup>, but it is useful for the purpose of analysis. At the root of the distinction is the concept of ‘agency’, which most social scientists recognise as a crucial

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Chambers, 1993, ‘Challenging the Professions: Frontiers for Rural Development’, ITDG

<sup>3</sup> Nour-Eddine Sellamna, 1999, ‘Relativism in agricultural research and development: is participation a post-modern concept?’ ODI Working Paper 119

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component of empowerment but which is not prominent in some forms of participation (see Annex A).

The concept of agency stems from the idea of the 'human agent'. Rural people can become the agents of their own development, or they can remain the objects of somebody else's development process. Farmers become 'agents of change' through purposive action which effects and demonstrates greater control over their lives.

"If a social worker (in the broadest sense) supposes that s/he is "*the agent of change*", it is with difficulty that s/he will see the obvious fact that, if the task is to be really educational and liberating, those with whom s/he works cannot be the objects of her actions. Rather they too will be agents of change. If social workers cannot perceive this, they will succeed only in manipulating, steering and "domesticating."<sup>4</sup>

Agency involves a self-directed process, not only in the practical sense of a person carrying out activities that impinge upon the material world, but also in a deeper ontological sense that involves the construction of that person and their world. When empowerment occurs, this deeper process manifests itself in lasting changes in perceptions and relationships. Recognition of these changes is essential to the transformational - rather than instrumental - view of empowerment (see Annex B).

"Agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or 'the power within'. While agency often tends to be operationalised as 'individual decision making', particularly in the mainstream economic literature, in reality, it encompasses a much wider range of purposive actions, including bargaining, negotiation, deception, manipulation, subversion, resistance and protest as well as the more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis."<sup>5</sup>

The instrumental view of empowerment is contradictory because it involves the intention to both promote *and* constrain agency. It involves giving rural people greater choice within pre-determined boundaries. It welcomes negotiation but shuns resistance. For example, farmers are allowed to manage their own community-based organisations in accordance with regulations provided by the donor or the state; they are given an opportunity to participate in the development and testing of technology that subsequently requires official approval before it can be widely used; they are taught to make their own decisions about crop management at the same time as being put under pressure to adopt or reject certain practices. In all of these examples, agency is *localised*, it is limited to decisions and action taken within narrow technical and/or social parameters. This is participation.

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<sup>4</sup> Paulo Freire, 1969, 'Extension y Comunicacion', translated by Louise Bigwood & Margaret Marshall and re-printed in *Education: The Practice of Freedom*, 1976, Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative

<sup>5</sup> Naila Kabeer, 2001, 'Discussing Women's Empowerment- Theory and Practice', SIDA Studies No. 3, Stockholm

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Increased participation can bring considerable benefits to rural people, and it can lay the foundations for genuine self-determination, but until agency becomes *generalised*, until relationships begin to change and the consequences of this change become unpredictable, it does not merit the use of the term 'empowerment'.

### 4. Agency in agricultural programmes and projects

If agency is the key to empowerment, then empowerment is not something that we – as policy makers, agricultural scientists and development workers - can do to rural people, rather it is a consequence of something that rural people do for themselves. Although agricultural development projects can be implemented in ways that initiate and support the empowerment of farmers, empowerment itself will always be outside of the project framework. Empowerment cannot be seen as sequence of project activities, nor can it be reduced to a measurable objective; instead, it involves rural people setting their own goals, managing their own activities and assessing their own performance.

Adoption rates are the antithesis of agency in agricultural development projects. In itself, the adoption process provides scope for reflection and analysis by farmers. But by using adoption rates in the design and evaluation of projects, development professionals are promoting compliance rather than empowerment. These adoption rates take a variety of forms, for example: 'improved varieties will be used on 10,000 hectares', 'at least 25% of households will have ceased shifting cultivation and planted fruit trees', 'average pesticide applications will be cut by a half'. In each case, project planners and managers have decided how rural people should live their lives. Planners and managers usually do this with the best of intentions, but they remain in control of the development process. They are the 'developers'.

Despite all the talk of partnerships, most development projects in the agriculture sector continue to be characterised by a sharp distinction between the developers and the 'developees'. Every few years we find a new label for the developees in an attempt to demonstrate greater political correctness. The past twenty-five years has seen a shift in usage from 'audience', 'recipients', and 'beneficiaries', towards 'actors', 'participants' and 'collaborators'. But in every case, the instigators of development, the people who fund and administer and evaluate projects, are talking about *somebody else*.

If agricultural projects were to focus on agency rather than adoption, the distinction between developer and developee would begin to fall apart. As a corollary of empowerment, we – as development professionals – must also become subjects of the development process. If we want farmers to gain power, we must expect to lose some ourselves. It is unrealistic to promote changes in the relationships of rural people, between the poor and the rich, between women and men, without also being open to changes in our own

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relationship with the people we set out to help. We cannot exempt ourselves from the transformation we claim to support.

What are the implications of this transformation for the design of agricultural development programmes? There is no single answer, rather there is a spectrum of possibilities. At one extreme, the post-development critique suggests that empowerment cannot be a sub-set of development; self-determination is not something that can be managed and measured by development professionals. Indeed, development and professionalism are parts of the problem, not the solution, and real empowerment will be a consequence of social movements not the result of projects supported by the World Bank, FAO and IRR<sup>6</sup>.

At the other end of the spectrum, there have been attempts to use agricultural interventions as an 'entry points' for empowerment. Instead of trying to make empowerment processes a sub-set of development, development activities become a sub-set of empowerment. This entails programmes that are carefully planned and organised at the outset, but which become increasingly flexible and open-ended as farmers start to demonstrate greater agency. The IPM Farmer Field School has sometimes – but not always – been used in this way<sup>7</sup>. The remaining sections of this article explore some of the opportunities and the problems associated with the use of entry points.

## **5. Interventions for empowerment**

If farmers are to become empowered through their own agency, agricultural development project can support them in two different ways: by enhancing the means of empowerment (without creating dependency) and by facilitating the process of empowerment (without controlling it).

There are a wide range of possibilities for enhancing the means of empowerment, including land reform, the provision of credit, and the regulation of markets. These interventions have an indirect effect on empowerment by expanding the opportunities that farmers face, and by reducing the risk associated with making choices.

By contrast, research and extension organisations have often attempted to have a more direct impact on the choices that farmers make. New technology can be seen as an opportunity, but it has frequently been presented as a prescription. Extension programmes have tried to bring about direct changes in three domains - knowledge, behaviour and social relations - by means of interventions that are based on a behaviourist model of learning and a transmission model of communication.

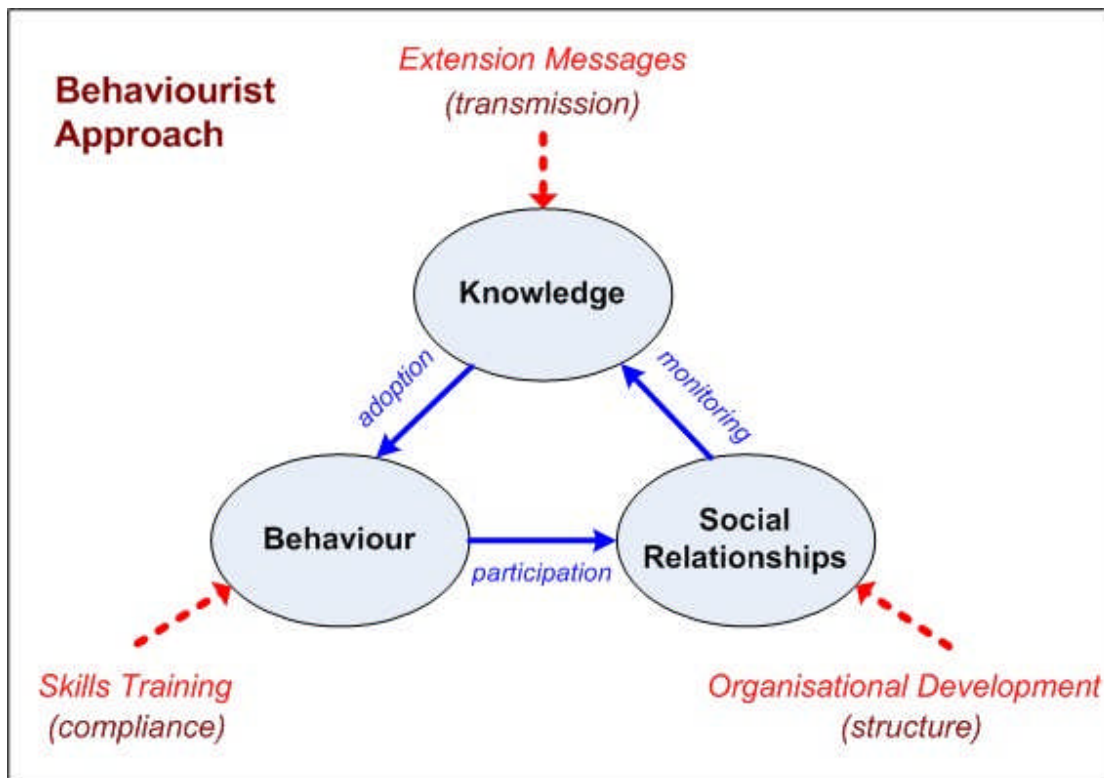
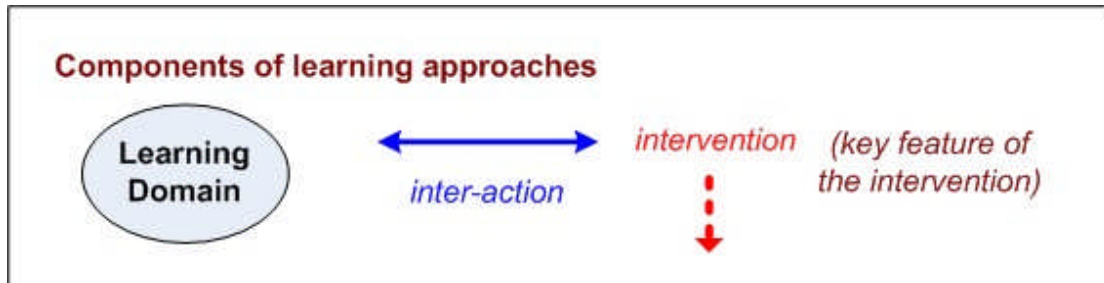
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<sup>6</sup> Arturo Escobar, 1994, 'Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World', Princeton University

<sup>7</sup> Pontius, J; Dilts, R, and Bartlett, A., 2002, 'From Farmer Field School to Community IPM: Ten Years of IPM Training in Asia', FAO

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As part of the behaviourist model, the mind of the learner is treated as a 'black box' that responds to stimuli from outside. What happens inside the box is considered to be irrelevant. By providing the learner with appropriate information, and giving reinforcement through punishments and rewards, desired patterns of behaviour can be produced in a predictable and measurable manner.

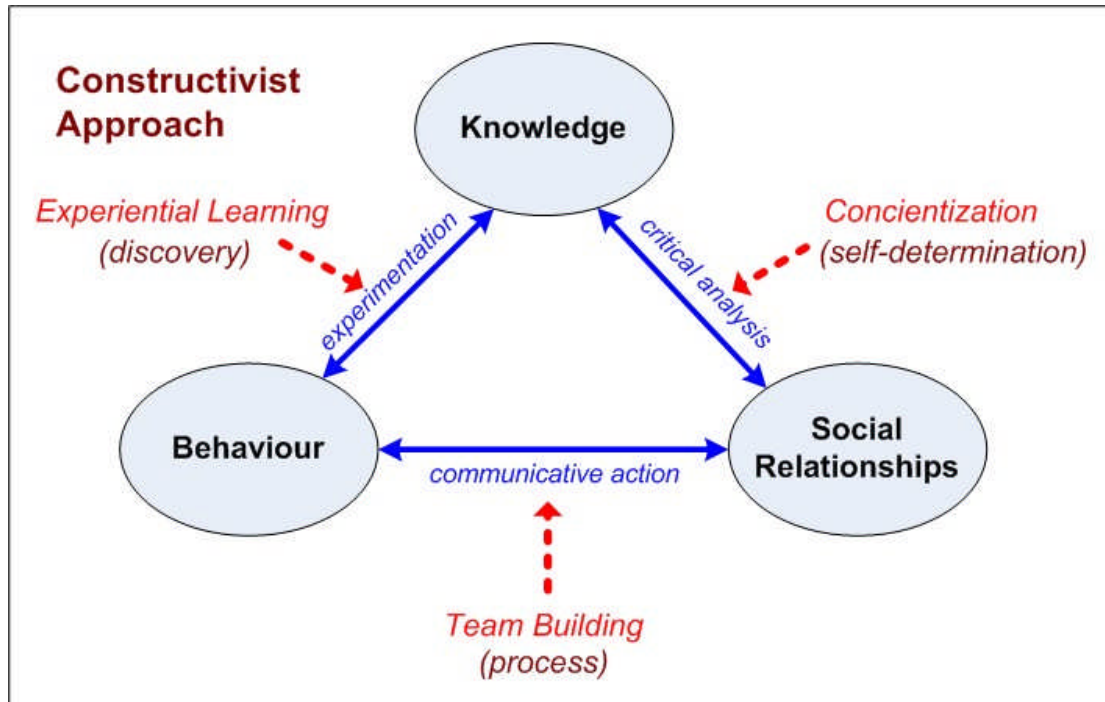


The behaviourist approach is a hindrance to empowerment because it does not recognise the importance of agency. The alternative is a constructivist approach to learning, which assumes that knowledge, behaviour and social relations cannot be transmitted from one party to another, but must be uniquely created by the human agent as a consequence of critical thinking, experimentation and communicative action.

In practice, the constructivist approach requires interventions that foster agency during the interaction between the three domains. In other words, interventions that facilitate the process of empowerment. For example, at the point of interaction between knowledge and behaviour, agency can be stimulated through experiential learning. By encouraging and supporting a

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process of observation and experimentation, farmers generate *their own* knowledge and make *their own* decisions about behaviour. This learning process has a number of variants which have been given different names: emancipatory, transformational, discovery-based. The critical feature of all variants is *ownership* by the learner, not just of the outcomes but – increasingly - of the process itself.



Behaviourist and the constructivist approaches are not mutually exclusive. It is possible – and often desirable – to deliver information to farmers *and* facilitate experiential learning, to conduct skills training *and* facilitate communicative action. What we need to consider is the link between the two approaches; which takes precedence? Are we delivering information to farmers so that they have greater opportunities for experiential learning, or are we facilitating experiential learning so that farmers know what to do with the information we are delivering? Are projects – as a whole – designed to maintain current relationships or transform them?

## 6. The assessment of empowerment

If agency is the key to empowerment, it should also be the key to the assessment of projects that aim to promote empowerment. Impact assessment becomes a search for consequent agency. Donors and implementing organisations cannot decide the precise outcomes of empowerment for rural people; farmers have to do that for themselves. What planners and managers need to do is look for evidence that farmers are taking control of their lives, and determine how helpful project interventions have been in this process.

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Where are we going to find agency and how are we going to find it? To answer this question it is useful to recognise that assessment is the manifestation of a relationship within or between groups of people. Below is a simple taxonomy of 5 relationships and the types of assessment that could be used to examine agency in each.

### ***Looking for agency: a taxonomy of assessment in development projects that aim to promote empowerment***

	<b><i>Relationship</i></b>	<b><i>Type of Assessment</i></b>
A	Self-assessment by developpee	Participatory monitoring & evaluation
B	Developpee assesses developer	Accountability mechanisms
C	Negotiated assessment by both	Constructivist evaluation (4 <sup>th</sup> gen)
D	Developer assesses developpee	Applied anthropology
E	Self-assessment by developer	Action research

The first two relationships in this taxonomy (A and B) have been given the name 'empowerment evaluation' because they are "designed to help people help themselves"<sup>8</sup>. In both cases, assessment involves reflection and analysis by the developpee, with performance and impact measured against indicators they have selected. The difference between the two types of assessment is that participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) is inward looking, while the accountability mechanism is outwards looking. PM&E could, for example, involve members a group of farmers setting their own targets and monitoring their own performance. As part of an accountability mechanism, however, the group could set indicators for the services to which they are entitled, and monitor the performance of the local government or a development project. In the first example they would present the results to themselves, but in the second example they would present their findings in a public forum.

A wide range of PM&E tools and techniques have been developed in the context of agricultural development projects, but they rarely challenge the power relationship between the developer and the developpee. By comparison, very little work has been done to develop accountability mechanisms, perhaps because accountability is – in itself – a relationship of power between two actors: the 'object' of accountability, the one obliged to account for his actions, and the 'agent' of accountability, the one entitled to demand answers<sup>9</sup>.

From an epistemological point of view, the third relationship in the taxonomy i.e. the negotiated assessment (C), is considerably more complicated than the other four, because it involves an attempt to explore and reconcile the perceptions and experiences of different groups of stakeholders. This type of assessment has been given the name 'Fourth Generation Evaluation', and the authors of the basic text on the subject have described their methodology as 'hermeneutic-dialecticism'<sup>10</sup>. Whatever you call it, negotiated assessment

<sup>8</sup> Fetterman, D.M; Kaftarian, S.J and Wandersman A, 1996, 'Empowerment Evaluation: Knowledge and Tools for Self-Assessment and Accountability', Sage

<sup>9</sup> Goetz, A.M. and Jenkins, R, 2001, 'Voice, Accountability and Human Development: The Emergence of a New Agenda', UNDP

<sup>10</sup> Guba, E.G & Lincoln, Y.S, 1989, 'Fourth Generation Evaluation', Sage

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involves an encounter between agents who may have very different worldviews (i.e. constructions), and it requires considerable skill – usually from an outside facilitator - if the views of all agents are to be treated as equally valid.

The next relationship in the taxonomy (D), the assessment of the developpee by the developer, is perhaps the most common types of assessment in agricultural development programmes. If we are looking for evidence of agency, however, the developer should focus on the processes undertaken by the developpee, not just the outcomes of those processes. This is not process evaluation as normally understood (ie. as a type of formative evaluation that focuses on how interventions are conducted), rather it is a form of applied anthropology, involving observations of interactions among stakeholders and – possibly – surveys of their opinions. The use of anthropological methods doesn't mean that the analysis is free of any judgements. It is possible to have as our goal the existence of a process with certain characteristics and, consequently, to examine the impact of our interventions on the occurrence of that process. Trying to assess human agency as a single process is enormously difficult, but we can break it into sub-processes that are easier to observe and record, qualitatively and quantitatively. Based on the three 'learning domains' described above, we can look for agency in *how* stakeholder knowledge, behaviour and social relations change over time; more specifically, we would examine the type and incidence of experimentation, communicative action and critical analysis.

Action research is the fifth and last type of assessment in the taxonomy. This, of course, is similar to the participatory M&E undertaken by farmers or other developpees. Nevertheless, there is a distinct literature describing the methods that professionals can use for self-assessment. The attention given to agency is perhaps most intense in *emancipatory* or *critical* action research, involving "participants emancipation from the dictates of tradition, self-deception and coercion; their critique of bureaucratic systematisation [and] transformation of the organisation and of the educational system"<sup>11</sup>. This sounds a lot like empowerment, not of the developpees – but of the developers themselves.

This taxonomy is not exhaustive. It would be reasonable to add assessment relationships between two groups of developpees (e.g. a farmer exchange visit) and between two groups of developers (e.g. a peer review). What has been excluded deliberately is any kind of *independent* evaluation, involving an attempt by outsiders to assess what the developers and/or the developpees have achieved. An independent evaluation precludes the need for agency by either party in the development relationship. Indeed, such an evaluation, by attempting to assign an official value to decisions and actions taken by the developer or developpee, would be inherently disempowering. If outsiders are involved in the assessment of empowerment, the most appropriate roles are facilitator or resource person, not judge and jury.

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<sup>11</sup> Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, 1996, 'New Directions in Action Research', Falmer Press

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The taxonomy does not include suggestions regarding the indicators or methods that can be used in assessing empowerment. Most attempts to identify suitable indicators have focused on behaviours that demonstrate agency (see Annex C). These indicators are inevitably case specific. Behaviours such as carrying out field trials, making use of credit, or joining community organisations could indicate newfound self-determination for certain people in particular situations, but could be considered routine for other people in other situations. In some circumstances, these behaviours could be a response to coercion. For this reason, case studies are often the most suitable method for assessing empowerment. Case studies allow both context and chronology to be taken into account, and can be used as part of all 5 types of assessment described above. Concerns are often raised about the scientific validity of this method, but these concerns can be addressed – to a certain degree - by using multi-method and multi-site cases (see Annex D).

## **7. So, what's the problem?**

Promoting empowerment through agricultural development programmes is like raising fish in rice fields: it can be done, but the conditions are not ideal. There are two aspects to this problem, the general and the specific.

The general problem is that development projects are inherently instrumental: projects are designed to achieve specific objectives by means of a predetermined sequence of activities that generate quantifiable outputs. Planned levels of outputs are used as indicators of success, and may be an intrinsic part of the contractual agreement between donor, government, and implementing organisation. Consequently the opportunities for self-determination among the stakeholders are limited from the outset.

Within the limitations set by project objectives there is usually scope for different approaches to be used, some of which are more empowering than others. But here we encounter a more specific problem, namely that most agricultural development projects are not designed to promote empowerment. Instead, these projects are designed to promote poverty alleviation or food security or the conservation of natural resources. Rightly or wrongly, there is a widespread assumption that these goals can only be achieved through a behaviourist approach. Consequently, rural people become the object of production targets, approved varieties, behavioural objectives, recommended practices, demonstration plots, model farmers *and adoption rates*, all of which are contrary to constructivist learning and the expression of agency.

Finally, let us return to the contradiction noted at the outset. It is hard to reconcile the agenda of modernisation, rooted in positivist science and implemented by means of instrumental projects, with the transformational nature of empowerment. So, why are agricultural development professionals promoting the idea of empowerment as a means for modernisation? There are three possibilities: confusion, cynicism and subversion. The confused professional does not recognise that a contradiction exists. The cynic recognises the contradiction but supports increased participation in the hope

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that this will contribute to national and international development. These two people want to grow rice, but are willing to let farmers eat some fish if it helps get the job done. The subversive also recognises the contradiction but supports empowerment - or tries to - in the hope that rural people will acquire the capability to take control of the development process itself. This last person wants to turn the rice field into a fish pond.

Here, then, is the knot of empowerment: a tangle of means and ends, in which there is no clear distinction between the 'developers' and the 'developees', or between the processes being evaluated and the evaluation process, and in which unexpected outcomes may be a better indicator of impact than planned outputs.

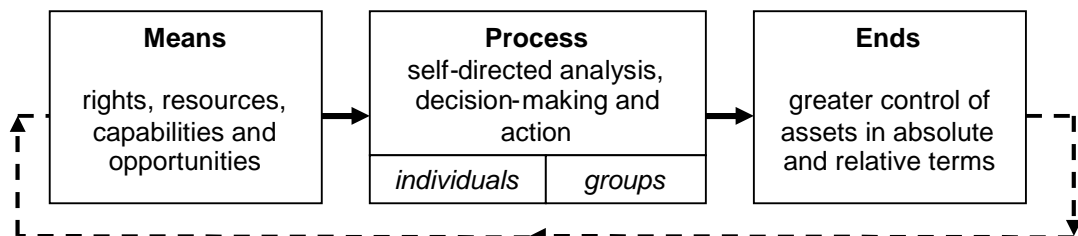
## A. A transformation model of empowerment<sup>12</sup>

Empowerment is about people taking greater control of their lives. This empowerment involves more than a few exceptional activities, instead it involves a profound and lasting change in the way people live their lives. In short, empowerment involves *a transformation*.

We can gain a better understanding of the nature of empowerment if we distinguish between three elements of this transformation: means, process, and ends.

- The means of empowerment encompass a wide range of 'enabling factors', including rights, resources, capabilities and opportunities. Means may be given or taken as part of the transformation; the key issue is what people do with those means.
- The process of empowerment is often seen in terms of 'making choices', but that is a simplification. The process involves a number of steps: analysis, decision-making and action. Only when the process is self-directed can we say that empowerment is taking place. This self-directed process, which can be carried out by individuals or groups, has been given the name 'agency' by social scientists.
- The ends of empowerment is people taking greater control of their lives. In the case of rural development projects this can be seen when certain social groups (eg. women, the poor, ethnic minorities) play a greater role in the management of livelihood assets, both in absolute terms and relative to other social groups.

### A transformation model of empowerment



All three elements of the transformation are needed for empowerment to take place. A change of *means*, on its own, may produce certain benefits such as access to services, but without *process* those benefits are a form of patronage not empowerment. Conversely, attempts to change process without the means being in place will result in frustration and failure. Only when both means *and* process have been changed is it possible for the *ends* to be realised, and even then it may happen that the potential for empowerment is not converted into greater control, perhaps due to resistance from other social groups.

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from Andrew Bartlett, 2004. 'Entry Points for Empowerment', CARE [www.careinternational.org.uk/resource\\_centre/rba.php?sid=12](http://www.careinternational.org.uk/resource_centre/rba.php?sid=12)

Generally speaking, a change in *means* creates the potential for a change in *process*. A change in *process* creates a potential for a change in *ends*. In many cases this transformation is cyclical, with a change in ends bringing about a further change in the means of empowerment.

People are not empowered in isolation, but in relation to something. It is possible to identify empowerment in the relationship between people and the material world. This happens, for example, when an individual or group acquires an understanding of a particular technology and are thereby enabled to manipulate their environment with greater effectiveness. Generally speaking, however, empowerment is viewed as a transformation in the relations between people. So, for example:

- women are empowered in relation to men
- the poor are empowered in relation to the rich
- civil society is empowered in relation to the state

Empowerment, therefore, involves a shift in the balance of power: there is an increase in the influence of women, the poor and civil society, *relative to other groups*.

## B. Towards a definition of 'Agency'

*The notion of agency connects directly with the concept of praxis.*

Anthony Giddens, 1976, *New Rules of Sociological Method*, Hutchinson

*To achieve this praxis... it is necessary to trust the oppressed and their ability to reason. Whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiqués, monologues, and instructions. Superficial conversions to the cause of liberation carry this danger.*

Paolo Freire, 1968, *'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'*

*The use of the term "agency" calls for a little clarification... I am using the term "agent" ... as someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well.*

Amartya Sen, 1999, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford

*A sense of agency implies that one can understand perceptively. Such understanding requires the ability and disposition to become critically reflective of one's own assumptions as well as those of others, engage fully and freely in discourse to validate one's beliefs, and effectively take reflective action to implement them.*

Jack Mezirow, 2000 'Learning to think like an adult' in *Learning as transformation: critical perspective on a theory in progress*, Jossey-Bass

*Agency implies a certain knowledgeability, whereby experiences and desires are reflexively accorded meanings and purposes, and the capability to command relevant skills, access resources of various kinds, and engage in particular organising practices.*

Norman Long, 2002 'An Actor-oriented Approach to Development Intervention', APO Tokyo

*Agency is how choice is put into effect and hence is central to the processes of empowerment... Agency encompasses both observable action in the exercise of choice – decision-making, protest, bargaining and negotiation – as well as the meaning, motivation and purpose that individuals bring to their actions, their sense of agency... Agency in relation to empowerment implies not only actively exercising choice, but also doing this in ways that challenge power relations.*

Naila Kabeer (2003) *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: A handbook for policy-makers and other stakeholders*, Commonwealth Secretariat / IDRC

*The importance of agency in the discourse on empowerment emerges from "bottom up" rather than "top down" approaches toward development. At the institutional and aggregate levels, it emphasizes the importance of participation and "social inclusion". At the micro level, it is embedded in the idea of self-efficacy and the significance of the realization by individual women that they can be the agents of change in their own lives.*

Malhotra, A; Schuler, S.R and Boender C, 2002, 'Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development', World Bank

## C. Indicators for Empowerment

### C1. Empowerment indicators relating to group development

Peter Oakley (ed.) 2001 'Evaluating Empowerment: Reviewing the Concepts and Practice', INTRAC, London.

Indicators of INTERNAL Empowerment	
Objective	Indicators
<b>Self Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership growth and trends</li> <li>• Clear procedures and rules</li> <li>• Regular attendance at meetings</li> <li>• Maintaining proper financial records</li> </ul>
<b>Problem Solving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem identification</li> <li>• Ability to analyse</li> </ul>
<b>Democratisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free and fair selection of leaders</li> <li>• Role for weaker members in decision making</li> <li>• Transparency in information flow</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainability and self-reliance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict resolution</li> <li>• Actions initiated by group</li> <li>• Legal status</li> <li>• Intra-group support system</li> </ul>

Indicators of EXTERNAL Empowerment	
Building Links with...	Indicators
<b>Project implementing agency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence at different stages of project</li> <li>• Representation on project administration</li> <li>• Degree of financial autonomy</li> </ul>
<b>State agencies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence on state development funds</li> <li>• Influence on other state development initiatives in the area</li> </ul>
<b>Local and social political bodies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representation on these bodies</li> <li>• Lobbying with mainstream parties</li> <li>• Influence in local schools and health centers</li> </ul>

## C2. Commonly used dimensions of women's empowerment

Malhotra, A; Schuler, S.R and Boender C, 2002, 'Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development', World Bank

Dimension	Household	Community	Broader Arenas
<b>Economic</b>	Women's control over income; relative contribution to family support; access to and control of family resources	Women's access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement /or representation in local trade associations; access to markets	Women's representation in high paying jobs; women CEO's; representation of women's economic interests in macro-economic policies, state and federal budgets
<b>Socio -Cultural</b>	Women's freedom of movement; lack of discrimination against daughters; commitment to educating daughters	Women's visibility in and access to social spaces; access to modern transportation; participation in extra-familial groups and social networks; shift in patriarchal norms (such as son preference); representation of the female in myth and ritual	Women's literacy and access to a broad range of educational options; Positive media images of women, their roles and contributions
<b>Familial/ Interpersonal</b>	Participation in domestic decision-making; control over sexual relations; ability to make childbearing decisions, use contraception, obtain abortion; control over spouse selection and marriage timing; freedom from violence	Shifts in marriage and kinship systems indicating greater value and autonomy for women (e.g. later marriages, self selection of spouses, reduction in the practice of dowry; acceptability of divorce); local campaigns against domestic violence	Regional/national trends in timing of marriage, options for divorce; political, legal, religious support for (or lack of active opposition to) such shifts; systems providing easy access to contraception, safe abortion, reproductive health services
<b>Legal</b>	Knowledge of legal rights; domestic support for exercising rights	Community mobilization for rights; campaigns for rights awareness; effective local enforcement of legal rights	Laws supporting women's rights, access to resources and options; Advocacy for rights and legislation; use of judicial system to redress rights violations
<b>Political</b>	Knowledge of political system and means of access to it; domestic support for political engagement; exercising right to vote	Women's involvement or mobilization in the local political system/campaigns; support for specific candidates or legislation; representation in local government	Women's representation in regional and national government; strength as a voting bloc; representation of women's interests in effective lobbies and interest groups
<b>Psychological</b>	Self-esteem; self-efficacy; psychological well-being	Collective awareness of injustice, potential of mobilization	Women's sense of inclusion and entitlement; systemic acceptance of women's entitlement and inclusion

### C3. Behavioural indicators of women's empowerment to be used by field staff of a Rural Livelihoods Programme

Andrew Bartlett, 2004. "Entry Points for Empowerment", CARE Bangladesh,

Indicator	Examples
<i>organizational behaviour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>women in leadership roles</li> <li>active participation in group decision-making</li> <li>self-determined collective action</li> </ul>
<i>planning behaviour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Setting own goals</li> <li>Agreeing upon and implementing a strategy towards the achievement of goals</li> <li>Self-monitoring of progress and achievements</li> </ul>
<i>entitlement behaviour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>exercising rights</li> <li>making claims as individuals or groups</li> <li>engaging in advocacy</li> </ul>
<i>economic behaviour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>holding and using cash</li> <li>making sales, purchases, leases</li> <li>negotiating wage rates</li> </ul>
<i>learning behaviour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>seeking information</li> <li>taking action to share knowledge with others</li> </ul>
<i>experimental behaviour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>testing and modifying technologies</li> <li>rejecting a recommended technology as a result of critical thinking</li> </ul>
<p>Characteristics of the selected indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The indicators are appropriate to the current level of control (or lack of it) experienced by most women in rural Bangladesh. These behaviours imply that a <i>transformation</i> is taking place;</li> <li>The indicators are <i>objectively verifiable</i>. It is possible for field staff to directly observe the transformation, rather than depending on information that is either ex-post or coming from secondary sources;</li> <li>The indicators are relevant to the project goals and strategies, and to the specific activities that have been carried out ie. there is a causal relationship between interventions made by the project and the <i>means</i> of empowerment;</li> <li>The indicators involve specific behaviours that provide evidence of <i>agency</i> rather than examples of the adoption of technology or the provision of services. The process demonstrated by these behaviours is managed, to a great extent, by women or the poor rather than by field staff, service providers or members of the local elite;</li> <li>The indicators provide evidence of increased control of livelihood assets, i.e. the concrete <i>ends</i> of empowerment are achieved as a consequence of these behaviours, rather than less tangible improvements in respect, recognition, confidence.</li> </ul>	

## D. Who did what? Assessing empowerment through case studies

### Some ideas

In order to assess the impact of project interventions on stakeholder empowerment we need to look for evidence of 'agency', ie. self-directed action by which people gain greater control over their lives. The assessment method must examine the *process* by which control was acquired and effected, not simply the outcome of that control. Rather than focus on *what* happened, the assessment must consider *how* it happened and – most importantly – *who* did it.



The case study is an indispensable method in many areas of research, including anthropology, medicine, law and management. In the biological sciences, however, the method has often been treated with some scepticism; case studies are frequently considered less reliable than controlled experiments, even though some major discoveries – such as Darwin's theory of evolution – were a result of case-based research<sup>13</sup>.

As a way of understanding empowerment, case studies have a number of positive features:

- contextual detail can be taken into account
- the study can cover process and outcomes
- a combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators can be used
- self-assessment by stakeholders is possible
- alternative ways of presenting information can be used: words, numbers, photographs, diagrams

<sup>13</sup> Garson, G. D. Case Studies, In 'PA 765 Statnotes: An Online Textbook', [www2.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/pa765/statnote.htm](http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/pa765/statnote.htm)

As a methodology for ex-post impact assessment, case studies have strengths and weaknesses. Among the strengths of the case study is the opportunity it provides for exploring the chronology that is inherent in any process; by providing information about the 'before and after' situations, plus an examination of the sequence of events that connected the two situations, a case study can go some way to establishing a counterfactual and attributing certain changes to particular interventions.

Among the weaknesses is the 'microscopic' nature of the case study, which reduces the possibility of making generalizations. The *validity* of case study research can be improved by using multi-method cases that triangulate between different types of data, and/or by carrying out multiple studies with cross-case analyses. Pattern-matching is one type of analysis that is particularly helpful in strengthening the validity of explanatory cases studies<sup>14</sup>.

Questions have also be raised about the *reliability* of case studies because they make use of qualitative data and subjective assessments. Rather than being a drawback, these characteristics may be helpful in the assessment of empowerment. The personal feelings and interpretations of stakeholders can be used as indicators of agency, particularly if there is an evident connection between changes in perception and changes in behaviour. Nevertheless, steps can be taken to improve the reliability of case studies by reducing the subjectivity of investigators. This can be done by establishing a rigorous protocol for the collection of case data, and by carrying out a peer review of the completed studies.

### An example

In 1997 and 1998, field staff of the Indonesian National Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program produced a set of case studies using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The purpose of each study was "to present a description and analysis of the development achieved by IPM trained farmers in one sub-district".

Case studies were produced for 182 sub-districts, each consisting of maps, chronologies, quotations, photographs, economic analysis, and various tables. In total, between 3,000 pages of information were compiled over a 6 month period<sup>15</sup>.

Three particular processes were examined in the studies:

- farmer field schools (FFS) and associated interventions organized under the national IPM program;

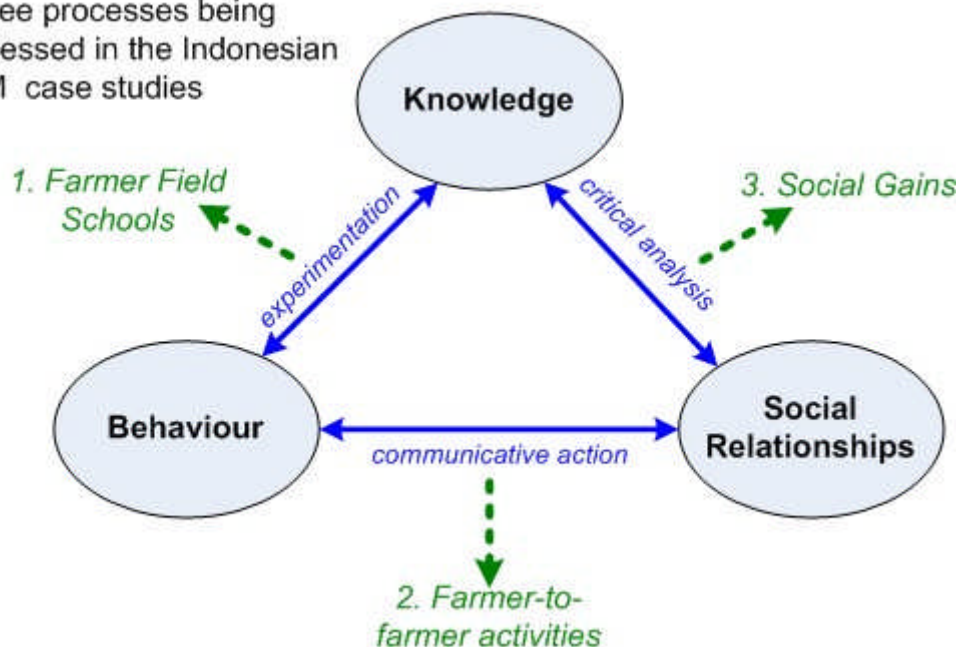
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<sup>14</sup> Yin, R. K, 2002, 'Case Study Research: Design and Methods (3rd Edn)', Sage

<sup>15</sup> One of these case is available online. See Susianto, A; Puwadi, D and Pontius J, 1998, 'Kaligondang: a case history of an IPM sub-district', FAO  
[www.communityipm.org/docs/Kaligondang.zip](http://www.communityipm.org/docs/Kaligondang.zip)

- farmer-to-farmer activities that were planned and organized by FFS alumni with minimal outside support;
- changes in relationships among farmers, and between farmers and the government, referred to as 'social gains'.

Three processes being assessed in the Indonesian IPM case studies



The field staff who carried the individual studies attended methodological workshops and were provided with an outline of the issues to be covered in the cases. Subsequently, meetings were held to discuss the information that had been collected and to review drafts of the study reports.

The process of producing these case studies, and the final results, were useful at three different levels: in the selected villages, where farmers ('developees') were able to participate in self-assessment; at the sub-district level, where teams of field staff ('developers') were also involved in self-evaluation; and at the national level, where the cases were examined for patterns and exceptions. At each level, the cases made an important contribution to team-building and management decision-making.

Independent cross-case analyses were carried out at a later date, during which two types of impact data were extracted from the case studies<sup>16</sup>:

- the incidence of 'spontaneous behaviour', as an indicator of empowerment;
- trends in pesticide sales, as an indicator of economic impact.

<sup>16</sup> Henk van den Berg, 2004, 'IPM Farmer Field Schools: A synthesis of 25 impact evaluations', FAO

In the first of these cross-case analyses, 62 types behaviour were identified that – although not planned – had been observed, and could be reasonably attributed to what farmers had learnt through the IPM programme. The frequency of each type of behaviour was determined by examining the 182 case studies. For example, farmers conducted their own field studies in 180 sub-districts (98.9%), farmer trainer associations were organised in 35 sub-districts (19.2%), pesticides were removed from village credit packages due to farmers protests in 33 sub-districts (18.1%), and the sale of other inputs was organized by farmers in 14 sub-districts (17.7%). These figures are *not* adoption rates as normally understood because the list of behaviours was drawn up ex-post, not ex-ante. What *is* being measured is the breadth and depth of self-determination among IPM farmers; in other words *agency*.

The author of the cross-case analyses concluded that “Substantial and widespread evidence from Indonesia suggests that FFS related project activities provide an impetus for spontaneous local programs with multiple impacts. The diversity of activities is indicative of farmer creativity and situational differences”. In addition, the data on pesticide sales in eight sub-districts showed a decline of between 70% and 99%, leading to the conclusion that there was “a clear association between strong local IPM programs and a drastic reduction in pesticide sales”.

It is worth noting that the cross-case analyses, drawn from 182 case studies in Indonesia, were part of a broader synthesis of 25 impact studies that had been conducted in 11 countries over a 10 year period. The methodology of the 25 studies was highly diverse, but pattern-matching during the meta-analysis allowed valid conclusions to be drawn about the general benefits of IPM farmer field schools.

### **A final comment**

Impact assessment, like any other activity, has costs and benefits. Based on the Indonesian example given above, it may seem that the multiple case study method was a hugely expensive way of collecting the data needed to assess the incidence of spontaneous behaviour and pesticide sales. Such a conclusion would be mistaken. The case studies were designed to a) facilitate the empowerment process by providing opportunities for communicative action and critical analysis, and b) strengthen the management of the IPM Program, both within and outside of the government apparatus. The generation of data that could be used for ex-post impact assessment was a side effect, a spin-off of these multifaceted processes.

Impact assessment often happens like that, as an after-thought, involving a scrabble for available data. Multiple case studies can be designed for the purpose of impact assessment, but it may be more efficient to use them as a project intervention that is valuable in its own right, which can be drawn upon for subsequent assessment.