Does Empowerment Work?

Description

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â??Does Empowerment Work?: Underlying concepts and the experience of two community empowerment programs in Cambodia and Tanzania â?• (2008), by Aldo Benini.

This book length document â??investigates the effectiveness in poor rural societies of a concept of modernity that has enjoyed an explosive career over the past fifty years â?? empowerment. From rich-nation self-help movements to the liberation of historically oppressed groups, programs claiming to give power to the powerless are legion. Often they are mixed with other normative master frames and social technologies such as human rights or micro-finance.

This study traces the origins, growth and underlying assumptions of the empowerment philosophy. It gives a detailed analysis of the structures, processes and outcomes of two large programs affiliated with the Lutheran World Federation. Consonant with the Federationâ??s Global Strategy, the Cambodia and Tanzania programs pursue empowerment, rights-based and integrated approaches on an equal footing. This offers rich opportunities to observe synergies and contradictions among those strategies and with their ambient societies.

Does empowerment work? Yes, at least to the extent that the observed programs have carried out, in poor rural communities and among some of their poorest households, an initial mobilization focused on self-assertive and planned improvements. Will it persist in global development discourse? This is more doubtful. â??Empowermentâ?• as a concept is so rich in meanings that it always depends on additional selections using other master frames. Moreover, it has not risen to a normative regime (as human rights have). Empowermentâ??s survival depends on able ideational brokers, but it remains relevant in response to enduring poverty and exclusion that keep issues of wealth and power burning.â?•

Tags

1. Civil Society / NGO
2. Empowerment

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