Measuring Empowerment? Ask Them

Description

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Quantifying qualitative outcomes from peopleâ??s own analysis. Insights for results-based management from the experience of a social movement in Bangladesh Dee Jupp Sohel Ibn Ali with contribution from Carlos Barahona 2010: Sida Studies in Evaluation. Download pdf

Preamble

Participation has been widely taken up as an essential element of development, but participation for what purpose? Many feel that its acceptance, which has extended to even the most conventional of institutions such as the international development banks, has resulted in it losing its teeth in terms of the original ideology of being able to empower those living in poverty and to challenge power relations.

The more recent emergence of the rights-based approach discourse has the potential to restore the â??biteâ?? to participation and to re-politicise development. Enshrined in universal declarations and conventions, it offers a palatable route to accommodating radicalism and creating conditions for emancipatory and transformational change, particularly for people living in poverty. But an internet search on how to measure the impact of these approaches yields a disappointing harvest of experience. There is a proliferation of debate on the origins and processes, the motivations and pitfalls of rights-based programming but little on how to know when or if it works. The discourse is messy and confusing and leads many to hold up their hands in despair and declare that outcomes are intangible, contextual, individual, behavioural, relational and fundamentally un-quantifiable!

As a consequence, results-based management pundits are resorting to substantive measurement of products, services and goods which demonstrate outputs and rely on perception studies to measure outcomes.

However, there is another way. Quantitative analyses of qualitative assessments of outcomes and impacts can be undertaken with relative ease and at low cost. It is possible to measure what many regard as unmeasurable.

This publication suggests that steps in the process of attainment of rights and the process of empowerment are easy to identify and measure for those active in the struggle to achieve them. It is our etic perspectives that make the whole thing difficult. When we apply normative frames of reference, we inevitably impose our values and our notions of democracy and citizen engagement rather than embracing peopleâ??s own context-based experience of empowerment.

This paper presents the experience of one social movement in Bangladesh, which managed to find a way to measure empowerment by letting the members themselves explain what benefits they acquired from the Movement and by developing a means to measure change over time. These measures , which are primarily of use to the members, have then been subjected to numerical analysis outside of the village environment to provide convincing quantitative data, which satisfies the demands of results-based management.

The paper is aimed primarily at those who are excited by the possibilities of rights-based approaches but who are concerned about proving that their investment results in measurable and attributable change. The experience described here should build confidence that transparency, rigour and reliability can be assured in community led approaches to monitoring and evaluation without distorting the original purpose, which is a system of reflection for the community members themselves. Hopefully, the reader will feel empowered to challenge the sceptics.

Dee Jupp and Sohel Ibn Ali

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Category

1. Uncategorized

Tags

1. empowerment
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