

Women Empowerment in Development: An Overview

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Abstract: This article explains the various concepts, theories and dimensions of empowerment that have been discussed by different scholars with different views. It is an attempt to organize research on empowerment and women involving domestic and foreign research with emphasis on the linkages between the four dimensions of empowerment, i.e. economic empowerment, social empowerment, psychological empowerment and political empowerment. Therefore, in this study, the concepts, theories and the dimensions of empowerment are explained by its significance. This study is a qualitative study that uses document analysis. The results show that empowerment contributes to the development of significant research on empowerment that has been applied in various fields such as social, economic, political, community development, psychology, health, education and organization (Ampumuza et al., 2007; Scheyvens, 1999; Sathiabama, 2010; Angahar, 2012) and at the same time delivering a better understanding of empowerment. Based on literature reviews, empowerment has been discussed by previous researchers at individual, community and stakeholder levels for socio-economic development purpose.

1 INTRODUCTION

The debate on the definition of empowerment is still on-going although the term “empowerment” has been used across many disciplines and each of the disciplines bring their own meaning and interpretations. What is empowerment? Empowerment is not a new concept for this era. The concept of empowerment has become an alternative approach to community development (Scheyvens, 2002; Cater, 2006). According to Perkins (Perkins, 1995), the concept of empowerment can be applied in various fields according to its suitability. Page and Czuba (Page and Czuba, 1999) viewed that there are three basic issues available to understand the theory of empowerment. First, empowerment is multidimensional as it occurs in sociology, psychology, economics, politics and other dimensions. Secondly, empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individuals, groups and communities. Third, empowerment is a social process associated with others (Peterson et al., 2005). Empowerment has been adopted in various fields such as social, economic, political, community development, psychology, health, education and organization (Ampumuza et al., 2008; Scheyvens, 1999; Sathiabama, 2010; Angahar, 2012).

Zimmerman (Zimmerman, 1995) believes that empowerment can be defined as a social process in a variety of dimensions that help people gain control over their own lives. Based on literature reviews, empowerment has been discussed by previous researchers at individual, community and stakeholder levels for socio-economic development purposes. This study contributes to the development of significant research on empowerment in terms of concept, theoretical and dimensions of empowerment in delivering to understanding of empowerment.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study aims to compile research related to empowerment and women. The main objective of the study is to examine the key concepts, theoretical approaches and dimensions of empowerment based on relevant literary outcomes. This study is a qualitative study using document analysis methods. This analysis involves the process of data collection and analysis of past studies related to research topics. Furthermore, the findings are organized into themes that have been created by researchers to

facilitate readers to understand issues related to empowerment.

3 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is the ability of an individual or group to make a choice and transform the choice into desired action and get the results from it (World Bank, 2007). Indeed, empowerment is a process of achieving something (Maholtra et al., 2002) such as the ability to communicate with the bank, ability to help others, ability to make decisions in the family and ability to plan effectively (Solava and Sabina, 2007). They also argue that empowerment is a form of control (how to control the individual's decisions), the choice (controlling autonomy and also decisions making in the household), the community (change for the individual's) and also the opportunity (change for the community).

When discussing empowerment, it usually involves different processes of change which are both external and internal. The process of internal change encompasses the belief or ability of a person to decide and solve problems on their own while external processes see one's ability to act and implement new practical knowledge, information, skills, capabilities and resources (Parsons et al., 1998). According to Charlier and Caubergs (Charlier and Caubergs, 2007) in human life, there are four aspects of empowerment that are power to assets to accumulate that include income, land, resources or technology), knowledge (the power to increase knowledge or skills by allowing an individual to control another individual or community to become a person leader), internal power (psychological strength, spiritual spirit, self-confidence as well as ability to make his own choices) and capacity (internal power to choose his own, take responsibility and be free to act).

In short, empowerment is the power and the freedom of self that an individual receives. In addition, power relations are more geared towards mutual relations to make a decision. Bailey (Bailey, 1992) defines empowerment in a project group is subject to build the group's and the environment that they live. However, scholars agreed that power ideas are the basis of empowerment concepts. Mosedale (Mosedale, 2003) lists four key aspects that are often discussed in these studies related to women empowerment. First of all, he said that before one was able to empower himself, they were initially in a

"disempowered" position. Among the barriers to this "disability" are the norms, beliefs, customs and values that exist in a society that distinguishes between men and women (Kabeer, 2001). Both self-empowerments is not a gift from a third party, but the individual needs to work to get it. Therefore, development programs implemented can only help and provide an environment to enable individuals or groups of individuals to get the experience for empowerment processes. All three dimensions of empowerment often include the ability and ability of individuals to make decisions about what is important in their lives. Fourth, empowerment is a continuous process rather than a final product. Each individual will go through the empowerment phase and the "disability" phase alternately throughout their lives. The concept of empowerment can be divided into four categories: legal empowerment, political empowerment, economic empowerment and social empowerment.

3.1 Empowerment and Women

The term of empowerment has been used since 1980 especially in the field of development (Imran and Farhana, 2009). Women's empowerment is when women are involved in the process of decision making to change their level of self-confidence, especially about women's status and how women make decisions in their home (Sharma, 2007). According to Mosiur et al (Mosiur et al, 2009), women with children who are still in school need to decide on schooling for children and decide on family medicine. Not only that, but women make their own decisions primarily in terms of household spending. Empowerment of women is a strategy for the development of a country because it involves the full involvement of women towards equality in society including participation in the decision-making process and access to power which is the basis for achieving development, equality and security (Hazel and Sally, 2000). Through empowerment, women have the power to change the socio-economic and development of a country (Jayaraman, 2008).

Empowerment of women is often the main objective emphasized in most development programs involving women's participation. However, there is not yet a definite definition to define the purpose of empowerment because each individual uses the meaning of empowerment for different things. Many scholars in the field of development emphasize the income generation aspect as one of the easiest ways to provide women

"internal power" especially in developing countries. (Ardener and Burman, 1995; Boserup, 1970; Fernando, 1997; Osmani, 1998; Sidney and Hashemi, 1994). The empowerment of women through micro-credit programs is one of the important aspects discussed in the study on empowerment in the 1990s. As a result, there has been an increase in women's involvement in the informal market as these markets are more accessible to women especially poor women. Most aid projects to women in Ghana focus on micro credit systems such as Grameen Bank it is called 'Milk lice' (Bortei-Doku and Aryeetey, 1995).

3.2 Definition of Empowerment

Empowerment is an increasingly popular term in development studies, sociology, public health and business. But the definition of empowerment is still unclear and is often misused in the development world (Taylor, 2000). Generally, Rappaport (Rappaport, 1987) defines empowerment as a process mechanism of individuals, organizations and communities acquiring or acquiring control over their lives.

The definition of empowerment continues to evolve in different contexts. Zimmerman (Zimmerman, 1995) believes that empowerment can be defined as a social process in various dimensions that help people gain control over their own lives. In addition, Gauthier (Gauthier, 1993) defines empowerment in the context of controlling that act in a distinct way to control their lives.

Page and Czuba (Page and Czuba, 1999) mentions that empowerment is a process of empowering (i.e. ability to implement) individuals, whether for their own lives or within society and freedom of action on issues that occur in their environment. Referring to the environmental element, Perkins and Zimmerman (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995) also refer to empowerment as a process that links the well-being of individuals to a vast environment. In addition, the term empowerment is also defined as individuals or groups who have the ability to determine their own success and will develop a "build" process that will help the public in controlling the factors affecting their lives (Cole, 2006).

The World Bank (World Bank-2002) provides a general definition of empowering definition of empowerment in terms of freedom of choice and action. According to the World Bank (2002), there are four main elements in empowerment:

- a) Access to information is power. Communities are told to be more willing to take advantage of opportunities, access to services, exercise their rights and ensure that the state and the authorities are responsible for their actions.
- b) Participation / opportunities - opportunities for poor and isolated groups to participate in decision-making on the use of limited public resources in building the knowledge and priorities of the local community and the commitment to bring about change.
- c) Accountability - government officials, civil servants and private parties should be responsible for policy, action and use of funds by government agencies.
- d) Capacity of local organizations - refers to the ability of the public to cooperate in organizing themselves and mobilizing resources to solve problems involving common interests. Organized communities are more likely to have their voices heard and their demands are met.

Malhotra et al. (Malhotra et al. 2004) have summarized the definition of empowerment by taking into various aspects. He argues that empowerment is one of the processes to gain power and control over decisions and resources. Additionally, empowerment also refers to independence, choice, dignity, control, independence and capacity to their own lives and interaction within society (Malhotra et al., 2004). But he thinks that there is no definite definition and measurement for the definitions of empowerment.

3.3 Theory of Empowerment

The theory of empowerment is identified from Brazil in, 1973; Pluto Freire has used humanity theory in the context of empowering education (Hur, 2006). Pluto Freire has put forward a plan or strategy to liberate the oppressed community through education empowerment. He believes education plays an important role in empowering the community and thus liberates them from continuing to be oppressed. He added that empowerment through education will enhance the individual's ability to identify the ability and the ability of individuals to identify their capabilities and abilities in terms of knowledge and skills (Hur, 2006). However, this empowerment theory is not only focused on education, it has also been widely applied in various fields such as psychology, management, political theory, social work, education, women's studies, economics and

sociology (Gershick et al., 1990; Rappaport, 1985; Swift and Levin, 1987; Lincoln et al., 2002).

Most previous researchers claim that the theory of empowerment related to psychological approaches. According to Rappaport (Rappaport, 1987) in the quotes from Tones and Tilford (Tones and Tilford, 2001) writings, empowerment is a major theory in community psychology to correct the prevailing imbalances in society. Psychological empowerment theory in society is also applied to achieve a better and more equitable distribution of resources among society (Tones & Tilford, 2001).

In addition, theory of empowerment also involves intrapersonal and behavioral components (Zimmerman et al., 1992; Perkin and Zimmerman 1995; Parpart et al., 2003). The intrapersonal component refers to how people think about their ability to influence social and political systems. While behavioral components refer to specific actions one can take to implement their influence on social and political environments through participation in community organizations and community activities. Zimmerman et al. (Zimmerman et al. 1992) supported the statement by stating that intrapersonal components and behaviors were consistent with empowering theory.

The empowerment theory generally refers to the construct that connects the strengths, individual competence and proactive behaviors on social basis and social change (Rappaport, 1981, 1984). The empowerment theory connects the well-being of individuals with a larger social, economic and political environment. The empowerment theory also refers to an "empowerment-oriented" intervention aimed to improving living standards, solving problems, giving individuals the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills and involve professionals as partners (Perkins et al., 1995).

Page and Czuba (Page and Czuba, 1999) viewed that there are three basic issues that exist to understand the theory of empowerment. First, empowerment is multidimensional as it occurs in sociology, psychology, economics, politics and other dimensions. Secondly, empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individuals, groups and communities. Thirdly, empowerment is a social process as it happens to be related to others (Peterson et al., 2005).

While Narayan (Narayan, 2002) emphasizes four key elements in empowerment theory, i.e. access to information, participation, mutual trust and local organizational capabilities. He added that these elements can be used to develop empowering theories that explain how empowerment

(individuals, communities and organizations) will lead to improved living, economic, basic services, access to justice and good governance (Narayan, 2002). As illustrated by Parpart et al., (Parpart et al., 2003), they emphasize empowerment as a result that can be enhanced and assessable.

The theory of empowerment also involves process and outcome, which is the process of showing action, activity or structure that leads to empowerment (Swift and Levin, 1987). While the results refer to benefits can be gained from the empowerment process (Swift and Levin, 1987). However, there are also researchers who argue that empowerment involves only processes (Rissel, 1994; and Levin, 1987; Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1988).

Processes and outcomes in theory of empowerment exist in three stages, namely individual, community and organizational levels (Bernstein et al., 1994; Perkins and Zimmerman 1995; Laverack and Wallerstein, 2001). The empowerment process at the individual level refers to participation in community organizations (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). At the organization level, the empowerment process refers to collective decision-making and co-leadership. While the empowerment process at the community level refers to collective action to access community and government resources (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995).

The result of empowerment is to see the effect of implementing empowerment processes at all three levels i.e. individuals, communities and organizations. According to Perkins and Zimmerman (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995), empowerment at individual levels refers to certain controls and skills. At the organization level, the outcome includes the development of organizational networks, organizational growth and benefits to the policy. While the empowerment at community level refers to the existence of a combination of organization and community access to resources around them (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995).

Kayat and Mohd Noor (Kayat and Mohd Noor, 2006) emphasize empowerment as capacity development or capability seen as playing two roles, i.e. (a) encouraging the community to engage, and (b) as a result of their involvement. Sofield (Sofield, 2003) defines empowerment as a multi-dimensional process that offers the community through consultation process, the opportunity to learn, the ability to make and implement decisions, acceptance of responsibility for decision-making, and the impact on their actions and benefits to the community and

its members (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005). Contradicting to the opinion of Maholtra et al. (Maholtra et al. 2002) states empowerment is a process of achieving something like the ability to connect with banks, the ability to help others, the ability to make decisions in the family and the ability to make effective plans.

Scheyvens (Scheyvens, 2009) has different opinions about the empowerment process. He argues that the process of empowerment refers to mutual actions by individuals in society who have the same aims and aspirations to make positive changes in their communities. This suggests that the process of empowerment in community development involves the cooperation of all individuals within society as well as engage stakeholders to work together to resolve planning issues and identify policies and actions for development.

There is also a researcher who believes empowerment is merely a process of thinking that the process is capacity building (Swift and Levin, 1987; Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1988; Rissel, 1994). The process is also understood to enhance the capabilities of individuals, groups, organizations or communities to (a) Analyze their environment, (b) Identify problems, needs, issues and opportunities (c) Develop strategies to address these issues, issues and needs and seize relevant opportunities, d) Form a plan of action, (e) Use resources sustainably to implement, monitor and evaluate action plans and (f) Use feedback as a learning process.

However, according to Rappaport (Rappaport, 1984) and Zimmerman (Zimmerman, 1993) there is no standard term that can explain the processes and results of empowerment. Understanding the processes and outcomes of empowerment will explain the importance to understand clearly the theory of empowerment. In general, empowering theory refers to constructs that link forces, individual competence and proactive behaviors on social basis and social change (Rappaport, 1981, 1984). The empowerment theory links the well-being of individuals to a greater social, economic, and political environment. The empowerment theory also refers to "empowerment" oriented interventions aimed at improving living standards, solving problems, giving individuals the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills and engage in professional groups as joint-venture partners (Perkins and Zimmerman 1995).

3.4 Dimensions of Empowerment

According to Scheyvens (Scheyvens, 1999) there are four main dimensions in empowerment, namely economic empowerment, social empowerment, psychological empowerment and political empowerment. Although previous studies have shown that empowerment have multiple dimensions (Gershick, Israel, & Checkoway, 1990; Rappaport, 1985; Swift & Levin, 1987; Lincoln et al., 2002), but according to Scheyvens (1999) the empowerment of dimensions in figure 1:

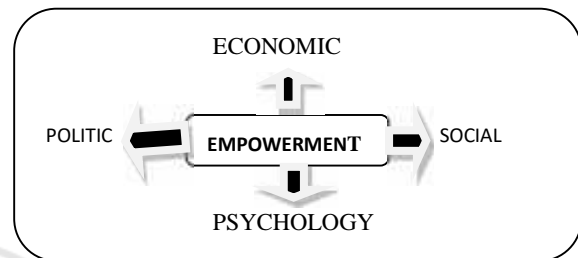


Figure 1: Dimensions of Empowerment (Source: Adaptation from Scheyvens, 1999).

According to Scheyvens (Scheyvens, 1999) the dimensions of social empowerment refer to the situation in which social unity and integrity are recognized and reinforced. It involves the existence of united society groups, including women, youth and the elderly. In other words, the strengthening and preservation of cultural traditions and the conservation of natural resources can enhance the social empowerment of the local community. Generally, social empowerment can be achieved when the community is able to maintain or improve the balance in the community.

Economic dimensions arise when communities are empowered to consider economic benefits directly or indirectly in the long term of economic advantages (Scheyvens, 1999; Timothy, 2007). Economic empowerment can be achieved when the revenue gained is shared among local communities with a fair distribution network (Scheyvens, 2009). And economic gains are widely distributed in the society, especially to the less fortunate, including women and the poor and not to the elite and outsiders (Timothy, 2007; Scheyvens, 1999).

The dimensions of psychological empowerment refer to community members who have confidence in the traditions, cultural and values inherent in nature and are optimistic about their future (Scheyvens, 1999). Psychological empowerment can

be seen when there is external recognition and in relation to the cultural values and natural heritage of the community as a recognition that can enhance self-esteem among the community and they are more excited to share their knowledge, traditional culture and experience (Timothy, 2007). This can enhance the sense of pride and enthusiasm that can lead to the growth of confidence among members of society to participate in social activities by mutual cooperation among the community (Scheyvens, 1999).

The last dimension of empowerment is political empowerment. It refers to the situation when political power can provide opportunities for local people or the public to voice their opinion in the decision-making process of its development and implementation (Scheyvens, 1999; Timothy, 2007). Political empowerment involves all community stakeholder groups, including ethnic groups, women and the poor, given the same opportunity to determine their own future (Timothy, 2007; Cusack & Dixon, 2006). However, Scheyvens (1999) does not state which dimensions are more important and which dimensions have a greater impact on community development.

4 CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it is clear that there are various concepts, theories and dimensions of empowerment and women that have been discussed by different scholars with different concepts and views. There are four-dimensional correlation of economic empowerment, social empowerment, psychological empowerment and political empowerment that Scheyvens (Scheyvens, 1999) is very significant to empower women in development. It is clear that the concept of empowerment is to achieve the integration of all four major dimensions for sustainable community development.

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