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**DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION DIRECTORATE
DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE**

DAC Network on Poverty Reduction

POVNET PROGRAMME OF WORK 2009-10

DRAFT POLICY STATEMENT

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THE ROLE OF EMPOWERMENT FOR POVERTY REDUCTION

DRAFT POLICY STATEMENT

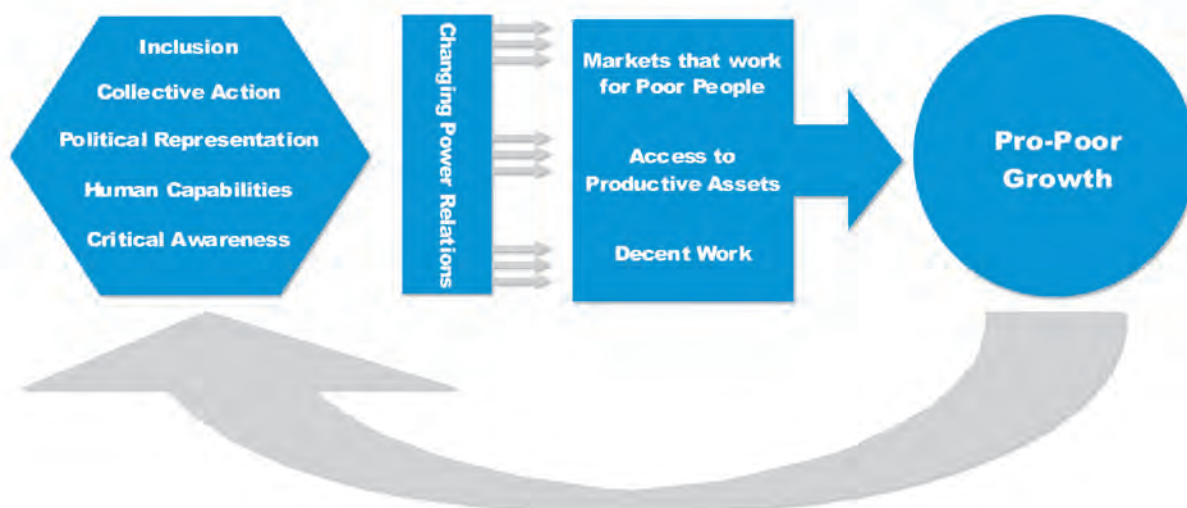
We have long recognised that it is the decisions and actions of poor people themselves that will bring about sustainable improvements in their lives and livelihoods. Inequitable power relations exclude poor people from decision-making and prevent them from taking action. We know that empowerment of those living in poverty is both a critical driver and an important measure of poverty reduction. It is essential for bringing about the policies and investments needed to expand the economic opportunities of the poor, to promote pro-poor growth and address the multiple dimensions of poverty. To release the potential of empowerment donors need understand what it means, how it works and how best to support it.

Empowerment means addressing power imbalances and is critical for meeting MDG 1

Poor women and men need to gain and exert influence over the political, economic and social processes that determine and, all too often, constrain their livelihood opportunities. Sustainable poverty reduction needs poor people to be both the agents and beneficiaries of economic growth - to directly participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes. Strengthening poor people's organizations, providing them with more control over assets and promoting poor people influence in economic governance will improve the terms on which they engage in markets. This type of economic empowerment combined with similar advances in political and social empowerment will make economic growth much more effective in reducing poverty.

KEY POLICY MESSAGES

- The empowerment of poor people secures their rights and drives pro-poor growth;
- All aid instruments can be designed to facilitate empowerment and encourage its multi-dimensional effects;
- Empowerment must happen through people's own actions, enabled by a supportive environment which donors can help strengthen;
- Donors need to deal with inequitable power relations that keep poor people in poverty and be aware of their own role in them;
- Empowerment takes time, sustained engagement and the ability to balance short term results and long term impact.



Empowerment is an outcome **and** a driver of development – it supports **and** is reinforced by pro-poor growth.

KEY MESSAGES SUPPORTING EMPOWERMENT FOR POVERTY REDUCTION

1	Partner country governments and development partners can play an important role in supporting poor people's empowerment. The right investments in economic and social infrastructure, regulatory measures supporting basic rights, including to decent work and to individual and collective assets, improve employment conditions and the fruits of labour. Valuing women's labour in the care economy is critical to their economic empowerment. Social cash transfers can do this while also strengthening poor households' ability to make more beneficial choices investment, consumption, employment or the sale of their produce.
2	All aid instruments, from budget support to micro-level projects, can be designed and implemented in ways that support empowerment. Even where the programme objectives may not seem directly related to empowerment, such as the construction of an irrigation system or rural roads, an intervention can be designed so that poor people's empowerment is supported. Many aid modalities provide opportunities for including poor people's organizations or representatives in policy dialogues, budget processes or choice of technical assistance and contract selection.
3	It is peoples' own actions that empower them. Donors can play a significant role by working with Governments to create an enabling environment for empowerment and also in providing direct support for people's own actions to empower themselves. Empowerment in one sphere leads to empowerment in others. Individual donors do not each have to attempt interventions across economic, political and social empowerment. Modest, but effective, interventions can have multiplier effects.
4	Empowerment is a process that cannot be externally controlled or managed. But, when Donors recognise and understand the inequities in existing power relations, they can facilitate and support empowerment processes and create space for poor people's intervention and influence in them. Donors are powerful actors in their partner countries and need to be careful that the exercise of their influence does not have a disempowering effect.
5	Donors can support empowerment both directly, through working with poor people and with their organisations and associations, and indirectly through partner governments by supporting the enabling environment and conditions needed for empowerment and pro-poor growth. Building capacities in both these areas takes time - as does changing deeply-embedded power imbalances. Defining and measuring empowerment outcomes are important for balancing their achievement with the desire for other shorter term results.

GOOD DONOR PRACTICE

Take into account existing, and potentially challenging, power relations	Donors need to understand and address inequitable power and incorporate 'power analysis' into their work. They need to understand how interest groups will react to, and seek to influence, programmes in support of empowerment if they are to have a realistic prospect of shifting the balance of power in favour of poor people. There are many effective tools already available from simple stakeholder analyses to more complex approaches for identifying drivers of change. The key is to integrate their use into programmes. Where power is challenged there is always the potential for conflict. Donors need to assess and be aware of the risks in promoting empowerment. Supporting locally owned empowerment processes that are already underway. Donors themselves are powerful actors and need to be aware of the effects of their actions on empowerment processes.
Support capacity development on both sides of the equation	Donors need to support empowerment in ways that foster learning and reflection among all concerned. For poor people, participating, for example, in monitoring and evaluation can itself be empowering if there is the space for them to determine what changes are valued and the ability to challenge 'development from above'. Donors should work with Government and other institutions to help create the space for voice and participation and the capacity to respond.
Design programmes to optimise the multiple dimensions of empowerment	Donors have a lot of experience in a range of participatory and inclusive approaches that seek to involve and empower poor people in decision-making and management of projects and programmes. Donors need to seek opportunities across the range of aid modalities they currently use to maximise the empowerment potential of aid. Empowerment takes time. Planning for long term engagement and incorporating the setting and measurement of empowerment targets into programme design is critical for balancing sustainable impact against the need for achieving short term results. Donor support, however, is, and should be, finite. Having an exit strategy from the onset is therefore important.
Supporting rights based approaches underpins empowerment	Supporting and promoting the rights of poor people is a useful way for donors to help create the enabling environment for empowerment. For donors this means addressing issues related to enhancement, awareness, enablement and enforcement of the rights that are vital for developing poor people's livelihood opportunities. Empowerment of poor people also helps secure their rights.