

Introduction to the Power Matrix

Valerie Miller, JASS Associates

The Power Matrix has emerged from a long-time collaboration between John Gaventa of IDS and Lisa Veneklasen and Valerie Miller of JASS dating back to the early 1980s and their joint efforts through the US-based Highlander Center to support popular education and community activism in the global south – from Appalachia to Central America and beyond. Colleagues at JASS use the analysis to help marginalized groups and their allies a) name power dynamics that undermine and exclude people from political participation and b) identify and develop a multiple mix of strategies necessary for overcoming these forms of discrimination and exclusion. The Power Matrix makes the link between different manifestations of power and processes of social change in an effort to strengthen organizations and movements dedicated to advancing justice and rights and living in dignity and harmony with the planet.

Over the last twenty years work on advocacy and rights-based development has increasingly gained credibility, producing some important policy advances at international as well as national and local levels. Yet we have found that these victories are often incomplete, quickly overturned, and can even undermine organizations and social movements that are crucial to sustaining long-term change. In the rush to embrace new approaches, important strategies have been eclipsed. As NGOs professionalized and advocacy won legitimacy, people have focused on the exciting nature of policy work aimed at the very visible dimensions of power. However they have tended to lose sight of the community organizing, movement-building and critical thinking aspects of social change work directed at the less visible manifestations of power identified in the early 80s by women's rights activists in their efforts around the world and by John Gaventa in his studies of poor communities in the US south. In grappling with this growing disconnect, we found that by combining their experiences and analysis we could provide a framework that brought together a more nuanced view of power, action and social change. In this way, groups could better analyze their own contexts, design comprehensive sets of strategies, identify and engage a more effective mix of allies and tap their own individual and collective power.

The Power Matrix summarizes an extensive analysis of power and action approaches in graphic form. It illustrates how different aspects of power interact to shape the challenges and possibilities of political action and citizen participation. The two columns at the left of the matrix describe the manifestations and forces of what feminists call 'power over' – visible, hidden and invisible – complete with concrete examples of how

these forms of power operate. The column at the far right includes a variety of strategies that reflect the vision and exercise of 'vital power', another concept from feminism, an expression of power that nourishes and advances a more egalitarian, caring notion of agency and action – 'power within', 'power with', and 'power to.' These forms of power and strategy are used to resist, challenge and transform 'power over' and are placed within the block where they are applied most frequently, recognizing that strategies overlap, interact and operate holistically. In reading the matrix from left to right, the particular forms of 'power over' and their relationships to the mix of approaches needed to transform them can be readily seen.

Even though we present these categories and dynamics separately, in practice they are constantly in motion, interacting and affecting each other. That is why they need to be seen as an interactive whole. The danger of frameworks is that they present information in static boxes without the possibility of action and connection. But nothing is static in the world; rather everything is connected and interacting, shifting and changing according to the particular moment and circumstance. The arrows in the chart are intended to reflect this dynamism. By illustrating the interaction between the different forms of "power over" and 'vital power,' the matrix serves as a tool to analyze and identify the strong weave of strategies necessary for resistance and long term transformation in particular contexts and circumstances. Some feminists find it applicable to all forms of social relationships including community and organizational as well as the intimate and personal ones.



THE POWER MATRIX

This matrix presents how different dimensions of power interact to shape the problem and the possibility of citizen participation and action. The distinctions among the different dimensions are not neat or clean. The arrows are intended to indicate the interactive nature of these various manifestations of power.⁷

POWER OVER	MECHANISMS	EXAMPLES	RESPONSES & STRATEGIES	TRANSFORMING POWER	
	<i>Through which dimensions of power over operate to exclude and privilege</i>	<i>Power Over</i>	<i>Power With, Power Within, Power To</i>		
	<p>Visible: Making & Enforcing the Rules Presidents, Prime Ministers, legislatures, courts, ministries, police, military, etc. United Nations, IMF, World Bank; World Trade Organization, Multinational corporations (Halliburton, Nike, Coca-Cola), private sector actors, chamber of commerce, businesses, etc.</p> <p>Instruments: Policies, laws, constitutions, budgets, regulations, conventions, agreements, implementing mechanisms, etc.</p>	<p>Biased laws/policies (e.g. health care policies that do not address the poor or women's reproductive needs)</p> <p>Decision-making structures (parliaments, courts, IFI governance, etc.) favor the elite or powerful and are closed to certain people's voices and unrepresentative</p> <p>Principle of 'equality' may exist in law, but parliaments and courts are not fairly representative of women and minorities</p> <p>International financial/trade bodies dominated by G-8 despite rising economic power of others</p>	<p>Lobbying & monitoring</p> <p>Negotiation & litigation</p> <p>Public education & media</p> <p>Policy research, proposals</p> <p>Shadow reports</p> <p>Marches & demonstrations</p> <p>Voting & running for office</p> <p>Modeling innovations</p> <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Etc.</p>		Building collective power
	<p>Hidden: Setting the Agenda Exclusion & delegitimization: Certain groups (and their issues) excluded from decision-making by society's unwritten rules and the political control of dominant and vested interests. They & their issues made invisible by intimidation, misinformation & co-optation</p> <p>Examples: The oil-gas industries control on energy/environmental policies & public debate about global warming and climate change; the Catholic Church's influence on global reproductive health policy in Latin America and elsewhere, etc.</p> <p>Often, formal institutions with visible power, also exercise hidden power</p>	<p>Leaders are labeled trouble-makers or unrepresentative</p> <p>Issues related to the environment are deemed elitist, impractical; feminism blamed for male violence/breaking families/sex industry. Domestic violence, childcare are seen as private, individual issues not worthy of public action; peasant land rights/labor rights are 'special' interests and not economically viable.</p> <p>Media does not consider these groups' issues to be mainstream or newsworthy</p>	<p>Organizing communities and active constituencies around common concerns, and mobilizing to demonstrate clout through numbers and direct action</p> <p>Strengthening organizations, coalitions, movements, and accountable leaders</p> <p>Participatory research and dissemination of information/ ideas/images that validate and legitimize the issues of excluded groups</p> <p>Use alternative media outlets/internet/radio to name and shame - exposing the true agendas and actors dominating public debate, agendas and policy</p>		Confronting, engaging, negotiating
<p>Invisible: Shaping Meaning, Values & What's 'Normal' Socialization & control of information: Cultural norms, values, practices, ideologies and customs shape people's understanding of their needs, rights, roles, possibilities and actions in ways that prevent effective action for change, reinforces privilege-inferiority, blames the victim and "manufactures consent". Dominant ideologies include neoliberalism, consumerism and corporate capitalism, patriarchy-sexism, racism, etc. Key information is kept secret to prevent action and safeguard those in power and their interests</p>	<p>Socialization/oppression</p> <p>1) Belief systems such as patriarchy and racism cause people to internalize feelings of powerlessness, shame, anger, hostility, apathy, distrust, lack of worthiness etc. especially for women, racial-ethnic minorities, immigrants, working class, poor, youth, gay-lesbian groups, etc.</p> <p>2) Dominant ideologies, stereotypes in "popular" culture, education and media reinforce bias combined with lack of information/ knowledge that inhibits ability to question, resist and participate in change</p> <p>Examples: Women blame themselves for domestic abuse; Poor farmers for their poverty despite unequal access to global markets or decent prices or wages</p> <p>Crucial information is misrepresented, concealed or inaccessible (e.g. WMDs & Iraq).</p>	<p>Popular education, empowerment, new knowledge, values and critical thinking tied to organizing, leadership and consciousness for building confidence, collaboration, political awareness and a sense of rights/responsibilities/citizenship which includes such strategies as: sharing stories, speaking out and connecting with others, affirming resistance, analyzing power and values, linking concrete problems to rights, etc.</p> <p>Doing action research, investigations and dissemination of concealed information and also using alternative media, etc.</p>	Building individual and collective power		