

Case study on the Jubilee Debt Campaign: Working across the levels, spaces and forms of power

Jubilee 2000: Debt and Poverty: Example and Strategy

An illustration of the use of the Power Cube may be found in applying it to an analysis of the issue of debt and its relationships to poverty. From a power perspective, the issue demonstrates how global policies can affect and usurp local participation. Global policies on debt, like most macro-economic policies, have traditionally been decided in 'closed' spaces, with little invited public consultation with or participation by those poor people directly affected, and few alternative spaces for debate to occur. And, this form of power in the policy making process is surrounded by forms of hidden and invisible power: the prevailing mobilisation of bias re-enforces the idea that policy is the province of expert economists. Poor people – whose schools may be closed as result of such policies – are often socialized to accept the legitimacy of such expertise, even when it apparently contradicts their own interests. While participation might be invited on issues of poverty, issues of how macro-economic policies contribute to the underlying causes of poverty are often systematically kept off of the agenda (for a very good analysis of this see Rowden and Irama 2004).

Yet, against this usual backdrop of power, we witnessed in less than a decade the emergence of a global movement to put the impact of debt on poor nations on the public agenda, and to challenge the power relationships that linked debt and poverty. Led by a broad coalition known as Jubilee 2000, which in turn built on previous efforts and coalitions, the movement at its peak had mobilized millions of people in both north and south. It is widely credited not only with putting the issue of debt on the international agenda, but for contributing to debt cancellation for dozens of countries, with consequent tangible effects in some places on education, housing and health care (Mayo 2005). While there were tensions within the movement, and while the issues of debt, aid and service delivery still remain of course an enormous public issue, more than many such transnational movements, Jubilee 2000 has been held up as an example of success which not only succeeded in winning relevant gains on a concrete issue, but in the process began to challenge the prevailing 'mobilisation of bias' which surrounded who should be involved in making macro-economic policy. Though some would argue that the 'mobilisation of bias' was later re-strengthened by new aid conditionalities and mechanisms, such as the PRSP process (Rowden and Irama 2004) for a period at least, the Jubilee 2000 appeared to offer the potential for positive change for those living in poverty. How do we explain this relative success?

The analysis in this chapter would suggest that in part its success is found in the ways that the movement was able to align itself across all the dimensions of power outlined in the Power Cube. Along the vertical dimension, not only did it mobilise at global meetings of the G7, IMF, World Bank, Paris Club and others, but it also built links with national organisations and campaigns in over sixty countries, which lobbied, campaigned, protested and educated in their own countries as well.¹ In many places, the campaign

linked with local groups, such as in Uganda where the Ugandan Debt Network mobilised and educated debt-awareness groups at the village and district level, who could articulate the connection between the global movement and budget priorities of local governments (Collins, Gariyo and Burdon 2001).

Along the horizontal dimension, the campaign spanned mobilisation in multiple spaces. While much attention was focused on challenging and making more transparent the deliberations of relatively closed decision making spaces, at the same time it took advantage of new opportunities for consultation, e.g. invited spaces, where campaigners could also negotiate and make their case, such as those related to discussions around the Highly Indebted Poor Country programme (HIPC), led by the World Bank, IMF and other bi-laterals. At the same time, it carried out mass mobilisation outside of both the closed and invited spaces, often simultaneously, symbolised most powerfully when in July 1998 in Birmingham when a 70,000 person human chain surrounded the G7 meetings and demanded to be heard.

And finally, and perhaps most importantly, the style of the campaign was not only to win the issue, but to do so in a way which changed the rules of the game about the transparency of global economic decisions, and which changed the awareness of those directly affected, as well as broader publics, about how debt affected poverty. Economic literacy and public education which enable local people to speak for themselves were just as important as technical research, professional advocacy (for further examples of this approach see Just Associates 2006) As one analyst of the movement has written, Jubilee 2000 'enhanced participants' critical consciousness, facilitating collective action as the basis for social empowerment and social transformation' (Mayo 2005:189).

Throughout all of this, there were of course difficult tensions and conflicts, e.g. about who spoke for whom across the local, national and global spaces, about working on the inside to reform global institutions vs. creating spaces and challenges from the outside, about technical advocacy for winning an issue vs. building popular awareness and self-empowerment that would sustain a long-term movement. All of these were contestations about power within the movement itself, yet, despite the internal conflict, the coalitions, collaborations and commitment to address these issues internally meant that the movement was somewhat aligned across all of the dimensions of the Power Cube. Other perhaps less successful global movements either fail to embrace such diversity, remain relatively localised or specialised though addressing only one aspect of

power, or self-destruct from internal tensions when they try and fail to align with others using different strategies.

The relative success of the Jubilee 2000 Campaign compared to many transnational campaigns and movements does not of course mean that the problems it sought to challenge have gone away – quite the contrary. The issues continue but are contested on a slightly new terrain. Now, several years after the Campaign, we could perhaps also use the frame of the Power Cube to analyse how power was able to re-accommodate and re-establish itself – while once decisions about aid might have been made behind closed doors, the new ‘invited spaces’ for participation, created through the PRSP mechanisms, also created new rules of the game that shored up the status quo; while aid flows might have increased from richer to poorer countries, the battle grounds for action simply then shifted to national and sub-national arenas. The point is that just as movements to challenge the status quo need to ‘align’ their own strategies for change along each dimension of the Power Cube, so power also constantly re-aligns itself to accommodate and respond to new pressures, creating new spaces for action and closing others, requiring re-assessment of strategies and new forms of contestation.

Adapted from **‘Levels, Spaces and Forms of Power: Analysing opportunities for change’** in *Power in World Politics*. John Gaventa. 2007. Routledge.

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