

Looking back is looking forward – a community power analysis exercise (2.5 hours)

This is an exercise the community members do together on ground to understand an event, an issue, an incident or an activity in respect to the exercise of different powers by different actors/institutions. It also enables an understanding on different power dimensions that could have used to avert adverse effects and make better the situation.

Tools: a detailed narration of the story, event, incident or activity, a flip chart folded into 4 cages where Power within, power with, power over and power to is written in each cage.

Power within	Power with
Power to	Power over

Also flash cards of different colours

Process:

Step one: General introduction to power and a discussion on who has power in a community and what are the different sources of power. Money, education, people's power, land etc can be some of sources as community members will discuss.

Step two: An introduction to the dimensions of power as written in the above illustration. – power within, power with, power over and power to. This is an orientation only and the indepth understanding will happen during the analysis.

Step three: Ask one member to narrate a recent story or incident that happened in the community – the persons involved, everything that happened in sequence order, the impact on individual and community at large, what change was brought about, the challenges etc. It has to be a very descriptive narration. While the narration is taking place the community members sitting around has to listen carefully. While the story is being told the facilitator will write down all the different character names on flash cards. Ex: the man or woman affected , the father, the mother, brother, friend , neighbour, NGO worker, government official etc. all the characters involved and who refused to get involved and who possibly have involved in the story has to be written on cards.

Step four: once the story ends, each of the community member sitting around will be given one character each, written on a flash cards and asked to reflect what role the character played according to the story teller.

Step four: After reflections they have to write down what that character/ person as written on the card has done according to the story. This can be done in writing or if the community members are unable to write descriptively the facilitator can write down for them.

Step five: with the help of the facilitator the community members will place the cards on the correct cage – under the correct power dimension – power within , with, over and to. The facilitator need to guide them and explain if needed as to why each card is in the respective cage.

Step six: A discussion will follow as to the incident and about the affected party and how each action of the characters written on the cards have had an impact on the victim/affected community. Stress will be on the different sources of power and how those were exercised. This need not be just negative but also how positively change was brought about by using power.

Step seven: Now the reversing of the incident will take place. Facilitator will generate a discussion on how the situation could have averted or the affected party could have been helped if different people and sources of power was used to benefit the victim or to better the situation. This will lead to an understanding how different power holders in a community can come together to make situations better or make peoples lives better. This will enable a thorough understanding of the dimensions of power and how individuals are responsible for power within and how community action in bringing their members together is seen important. The fact that power holders can be influenced by such collective power to bring about action to change situations is to be internalized during this discussion.

Step eight: A final look at the story and how things could have happened differently if different actors/characters have acted and exercised their power differently need to be facilitated.

An example of how this tool was used in Sri Lanka by Creators' Forum, a forum of Consultants working on Capacity Development of NGDO staff and leadership.

In July 2009, a team of NGDO managers and leaders met to discuss the concept of "power" at a workshop aimed at NGDO leadership enhancement. There were 20 NGDO senior leaders in this programme facilitated by Creators' Forum. The concept of power was discussed at first using the following questions:

1. What unique power do you think you possess??
2. Why do you think it is unique??
3. Have you ever exercised this power?? When, with whom and for what??
4. What challenges did you confront in doing so??
5. How did you over come such challenges??
6. Did you see any source of power in relation to those challenges??

A general discussion followed these questions and 6 participants shared their experience of exercising power which they thought is unique to them.

Using these experiences the concepts of power within, power with, power over and power to was explained to the large group of participants. A lot of time was allocated to answer the questions on the concepts. They found it easy to understand the first two – power within and power with as they had a lot of community experiences but understanding power over and power to was difficult and they were constantly shifting

between the two. It was necessary to draw examples of how certain policy decisions could be influenced using collective power of the people and explain that is what power over policy makers means. The ability to bring about changes in the lives of the people due to such policy influence was explained as power to change.

Once it was confirmed that they understood the concepts the group was asked to sit on the floor facing each other. One participant from the plantation community working as the Director of an NGDO volunteered to share a story that happened in the community a few months ago. The other participants were asked to listen carefully and identify the different characters in the story. The story was as follows;

"In a tea estate a seven months pregnant woman had a severe fall while plucking tea leaves at a higher elevation. Other women shouted and called the Kangany (the field supervisor) to help out. He came and rushed to the estate manager's office to get a vehicle to take the woman to the hospital. The woman was bleeding a lot. It took about 4 hours for the Kangany to find a vehicle and finally the management gave a lorry that is used to transport tea leaves to the factory. However the woman was taken to the hospital in it and it took 3 hours to reach the hospital from the estate. By the time the woman reached the hospital the woman was only half conscious.

At the hospital she delivered a baby but it was a still birth. The condition of the woman became worse and after three days of suffering she too died. At the time of death she was only 24 years of age and this was her third pregnancy. Her other two children are small 3 and 2 years of age. Her husband is also a plantation sector worker, working in the tea factory."

After listening to the story, the participants wrote down all the key characters who could have been connected to the story – the pregnant woman, husband, two children, her mother, her fellow workers, kangany, estate manager, trade union leaders, estate sector policy makers, the health worker, the doctor, the lorry driver, the mid wife of the estate, the relevant Health Ministry officials, etc. Each participant had one card with the character name in it.

Then the participants were asked to reverse the story and were asked the following questions:

1. In the role as indicated in your card what could you have done to avert this death?? How could you have used your power to prevent this happening??

All the participants started reflecting and writing the things that they could have done so that this unfortunate situation would not have happened. For example the woman herself could have asked the Kangany to give her a place at a lower elevation to pluck leaves. (In plantation sector policy it is written down that a pregnant woman should be given a low elevation upon request). The estate management wrote that they could have acted fast and given a better and comfortable vehicle to rush the woman to the hospital. The union workers wrote that they could have taken steps to make the workers aware of their rights, specially the pregnant women of the policies.

All the participants were asked to place the cards they wrote on in the relevant column out of the four columns – power within, power with, power over and power to. Then a discussion on how the situation would have changed if those with power have acted differently followed and the realization of different sources of power and how such power can be used to bring about change, as individuals, groups etc took place.

A very effective power analysis was done with the entire group in a very participatory manner. The internalization was how such stories and power analysis will enable collective reflection and planning for future.