

Right to be Heard: breaking power analysis into component parts

Jo Rowlands 31/08/08

1. Thinking about the action domain for addressing power where action is taking place:
 - a) the Civic realm (civil society – including media, civil society organisations and networks, NGOs, faith organisations, trades unions)
 - b) the State realm (government, institutions of governance)
 - c) the market realm (private sector firms, employers, producer organisations)
 - d) the Social realm (communities, households, particular identity groups)

(the borders between these categories are not rigid – trades unions, for example, can be thought of within the civic realm, or within the labour market, depending on the issues/spaces being considered)

2. Thinking about the strategies for change to be employed:
 - a) Citizenship: building and strengthening individual awareness and capacities
 - b) Collective action/voice: building and strengthening organisations, networks, alliances
 - c) Enabling environment - legal and policy: creating or changing the legal structures and policy environment for enabling citizen action
 - d) Enabling environment - Institutions and organisations that support and encourage rather than block

3. Thinking about the power spectrum:
 What kind(s) of power are being addressed (from actors and processes to attitudes, norms, beliefs)?
 - a) the level(s) – household, local, regional/district, national, global (as appropriate)
 - b) the spaces where power operates – closed, invited, created/claimed
 - c) the kind of power – visible, hidden, invisible; and power over, power with, power to, power within

The various aspects of the power spectrum can operate in relation to any combination of action domain and strategy, and synergy can usually be created by working with more than one of each. So, for example, working in the state realm, with a strategy of creating an enabling environment for voice, you might work at local level, with local government structures, to advocate for the implementation of a policy change already made nationally. This could be done through the visible power structures, or through the informal, hidden power relations, to open up invited spaces such as community consultation processes.

It might be useful to use a matrix format along these lines, and then consider how the power spectrum plays out within each cell:

Strategy \ Action domain	Individual citizenship	Collective action	Legal & policy environment	Institutional/ organisational environment
Civic realm				
State realm				
Market realm				
Social realm				

Here is an **incomplete sample** of how a programme of work on women’s rights and participation might map out, showing how the power spectrum can show within each cell:

Strategy Action domain	Individual citizenship	Collective action	Legal & policy environment	Institutional/ organisational environment
Civic realm	Work with women to understand and exercise their rights to participate (norms & beliefs, invisible power, power within) and with men to support them in doing that (shifting power over, visible power, hidden power)	Village level organising of women’s groups (power with) and skill development (power to); work with traditional leaders to encourage their support of women’s participation (shifting power over, hidden power, visible power – depending on nature of context)	Work to support CSOs and NGOs/networks in developing capacity to advocate for policy on participation (power to/with; ability to engage with invited space and to create space) Advocacy for policy to require participation of all stakeholders (creation of invited space and encouraging created space)	Work with national NGO organisations to address gender and women’s rights and participation within their own programmes and ways of working (invisible power, hidden power, transformation of power over and how invited spaces are used)
State realm	Development of capacities of individual civil servants/public employees to listen and respect women as citizens (shifting invisible power)	Local government capacity and willingness to engage with citizen participation (shifting power over and invisible power)	Equality and anti-discrimination legislation; gender policy, participation policy	Development of capacity of national Women’s Ministry to function effectively within government (power to)
Market realm	Development of women’s economic literacy and entrepreneurship/business skills (power to, increasing economic empowerment)	Setting up producer co-operative structures to increase power in markets for small producers (power to, power with)	Co-operatives law; Regulation of markets that recognises legitimacy of co-operatives & social enterprises; work on trade rules	Work with regulation authorities to increase effectiveness of implementation; work with big business on corporate social responsibility
Social realm	Identity issues	Inclusion issues	Anti-discrimination policy going beyond workplace	