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UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING WITH POWER.

Effective Advising in Statebuilding and Peacebuilding Contexts – How

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1. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ANALYSE AND UNDERSTAND 'POWER'?

Anyone interested in 'change' has an interest in understanding 'power', because 'power' is both one of the constraining factors to change and one of its enablers. Power analysis therefore is an integral aspect of any political economy analysis; strategies and tactics for change will be influenced by how the nature and distribution of power in a given environment is understood; and 'power' is a core aspect of the confidence and energy to make the change. Understanding and working with power is central to efforts to reduce inequality, poverty and authoritarian oppression, and to promote a more 'democratic culture' and more participatory, transparent, responsive and accountable governance. It is a central attention point also in multi-stakeholder processes, where there are almost always asymmetries between stakeholders: asymmetries based on formal authority/power, wealth, social status, gender, age, knowledge about the issue, self-confidence etc.

2. UNDERSTANDING POWER.

a) Manifestations or Faces of Power: visible, invisible and hidden power.

Often, the attention remains focused on the power that is most visible, on who has the formal authority i.e. power to make decisions. But equally important are 'hidden' and 'invisible' power.

➤ *Visible power: observable decision making*

This level includes the visible and definable aspects of political power – the formal rules, structures, authorities, institutions and procedures of decision making … Strategies that target this level are usually trying to change the 'who, how and what' of policymaking so that the policy process is more democratic and accountable, and serves the needs and rights of people and the survival of the planet.

➤ *Hidden power: setting the political agenda*

Certain powerful people and institutions maintain their influence by controlling who gets to the decision-making table and what gets on the agenda. These dynamics operate on many levels to exclude and devalue the concerns and representation of other less powerful groups … Empowering advocacy strategies that focus on strengthening organisations and movements of the poor can build the collective power of numbers and new leadership to influence the way the political agenda is shaped and increase the visibility and legitimacy of their issues, voice and demands.

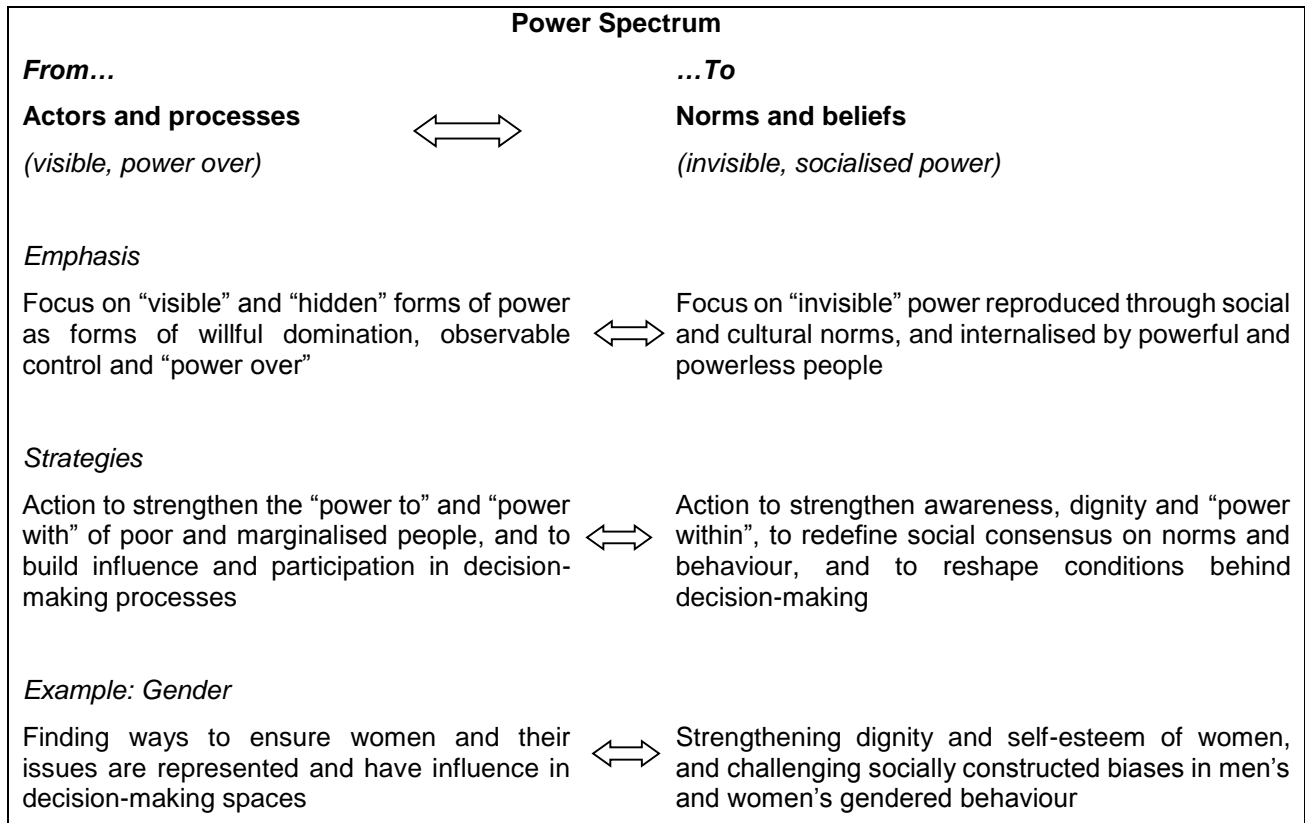➤ *Invisible power: shaping meaning and what is acceptable*

Probably the most insidious of the three dimensions of power, invisible power shapes the psychological and ideological boundaries of participation. Significant problems and issues are not only kept from the decision-making table, but also from the minds and consciousness of the different players involved, even those directly affected by the problem. By influencing how individuals think about their place in the world, this level of power shapes people's beliefs, sense of self and acceptance of the status quo – even their own superiority or inferiority. Processes of socialisation, culture and ideology perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal, acceptable and safe. Change strategies in this area target social and political culture as well as individual consciousness to transform the way people perceive themselves and those around them, and how they envisage future possibilities and alternatives.

○ *Manifestations of power as analytical framework*: Recognising these different 'manifestations' of power can shape what we start looking at in our analyses, as illustrated by the next table that looks at dynamics of power, inclusion and exclusion in the context of political participation.

	MICRO POWER (power dynamics within an individual, organisation, community)	MACRO POWER (power dynamics that shape broader public spaces, national and international arenas)
VISIBLE POWER Observable decision-making	What does representation look like within our communities and organisations (who is speaking for whom, what are class, gender, race, and other differences?) Who are the leaders and what are the opportunities for new leadership? What are the coalition dynamics? How are decisions made? How is conflict managed?	What does representation look like in formal political spaces, international financial institutions etc. How are public policy decisions made? (Who is included in the process and who is not?) How do decision-makers interact or not, with citizens / stakeholders?
HIDDEN POWER Setting the agenda	Within family / community / organisations / local movements, what agendas dominate? Are gender, class, ethnicity and other dimensions integrated into justice strategies? How is information gathered and use? To what extent is practical knowledge valued alongside formal 'technical/thematic' expertise?	What institutions and/or individuals have access to the decision-making process and how is this access determined? How do civil society groups project their agenda and get their issues on the decision-makers' agenda? How are spaces created to negotiate with decision-makers? How is information produced and used?
INVISIBLE POWER Shaping meaning and sense of social self	How do internalized social (gender, race, class, religion etc.) roles and stereotypes play out in family, work and community? Do people think they are too 'stupid' to understand the problems that affect them? Do they think they have no role and no right in changing their situation and they are to blame for being poor?	Is there systematic discrimination / exclusion whether on the basis of gender, class, race, age, religion etc.? How are problems 'sold' to the public – as natural, inevitable? Are people made to feel they have a role in the solution? What is the paradigm of development/stabilization/peacebuilding that underlies decision-making?

(VeneKlasen & Miller 2006:41 – with very slight adaptations)

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○ *Manifestations of power and strategies for change*: Achieving positive change may mean catalyzing the positive power of those stakeholders that have been fairly marginalized and excluded, and have been kept or even gone silent, to give them greater influence over the decisions that affect their lives. It is easy to understand however how 'power over' can generate resistance and acts as an obstacle to positive change. But we have to recognise that the invisible, socialized and internalized 'power within' can be an equally strong obstacle to positive change. Where people do not believe they have certain rights and/or have no confidence at all in their abilities to actively engage even on issues that matter very much to them, change will be difficult.

Power Spectrum	
From…	*…To*
Actors and processes ⟷	**Norms and beliefs**
(visible, power over)	*(invisible, socialised power)*
Emphasis	
Focus on "visible" and "hidden" forms of power as forms of willful domination, observable control and "power over" ⟷	Focus on "invisible" power reproduced through social and cultural norms, and internalised by powerful and powerless people
Strategies	
Action to strengthen the "power to" and "power with" of poor and marginalised people, and to build influence and participation in decision-making processes ⟷	Action to strengthen awareness, dignity and "power within", to redefine social consensus on norms and behaviour, and to reshape conditions behind decision-making
Example: Gender	
Finding ways to ensure women and their issues are represented and have influence in decision-making spaces ⟷	Strengthening dignity and self-esteem of women, and challenging socially constructed biases in men's and women's gendered behaviour

Our analysis of the different manifestations of power in a given environment therefore will inform our strategies for change. The 'Power Matrix' on the next page shows an illustration of this.

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]

MECHANISMS *Through which dimensions of power over operate to exclude and privilege*	EXAMPLES *Power Over*	RESPONSES & STRATEGIES *Power With, Power Within, Power To*	
Visible: Making & Enforcing the Rules Presidents, Prime Ministers, legislatures, courts, ministries, police, military, etc. United Nations, IMF, World Bank; World Trade Organization, Multinational corporations (Haliburton, Nike, Coca-Cola), private sector actors, chamber of commerce, businesses, etc. Instruments: Policies, laws, constitutions, budgets, regulations, conventions, agreements, implementing mechanisms, etc.	Biased laws/policies (e.g. health care policies that do not address the poor or women's reproductive needs) Decision-making structures (parliaments, courts, IFI governance, etc.) favor the elite or powerful and are closed to certain people's voices and unrepresentative Principle of 'equality' may exist in law, but parliaments and courts are not fairly representative of women and minorities International financial/trade bodies dominated by G-8 despite rising economic power of others	Lobbying & monitoring Negotiation & litigation Public education & media Policy research, proposals Shadow reports Marches & demonstrations Voting & running for office Modeling innovations Collaboration Etc.	*Building collective power*
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 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. Often, formal institutions with visible power, also exercise hidden power	Leaders are labeled trouble-makers or unrepresentative 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. Media does not consider these groups' issues to be mainstream or newsworthy	Organizing communities and active constituencies around common concerns, and mobilizing to demonstrate clout through numbers and direct action Strengthening organizations, coalitions, movements, and accountable leaders Participatory research and dissemination of information/ ideas/images that validate and legitimize the issues of excluded groups Use alternative media outlets/internet/radio to name and shame - exposing the true agendas and actors dominating public debate, agendas and policy	*Confronting, engaging, negotiating*
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	Socialization/oppression 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. 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 Examples: Women blame themselves for domestic abuse; Poor farmers for their poverty despite unequal access to global markets or decent prices or wages Crucial information is misrepresented, concealed or inaccessible (e.g. WMDs & Iraq).	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. Doing action research, investigations and dissemination of concealed information and also using alternative media, etc.	*Building individual and collective power*

POWER OVER

TRANSFORMING POWER

b. The Natures of Power: power over – power to, power with and power within.

Just as there is a tendency to concentrate on the visible manifestations of power, there is also a prevailing tendency to see 'power' in negative terms i.e. the ability to control others (power over). In that perspective power has to be a zero-sum game: one actor gaining more power can only be at the expense of another actor losing some of it.

But 'power' also has to be understood in 'positive' terms: it is the ability of an actor to do something 'power to'. That ability can be enhanced through collaborative efforts which create a power or ability greater than the sum of its separate members: 'power with'. But acting rather than being passive, also requires a level of self-esteem, of internal confidence: 'power within'.

The 'Power Matrix' approach on the previous page remains essentially based on the 'power over' premise, and seeks to change the 'balance of power'.

But positive change may also be achieved by showing powerful actors that power does not have to be a 'zero-sum game', and that they can achieve more (and yes, also benefit personally) by pursing 'power with'. This can apply to internal organizational development and change management, where a more inclusive approach (power with) can generate broader support for change which avoids the broad-based resistance that a top-down approach may trigger. This can also apply to policy making and policy implementation with regard to the many increasingly complex issues that governments face: collaborative approaches (power with) open up the space for many more sources of ideas and possible solutions, can generate greater drive and energy to implement, and invite a sense of co-ownership but also shared responsibility, that reduces the temptations to turn to the 'blame-game', when efforts to do advance as quickly as announced or do not deliver all of the expected benefits.

c. Power Resides at Multiple Levels.

Power in its different forms does not only reside at the level of 'national politics'. It plays out at the local and at the regional / global level (and given the increasing interconnectedness of the world, we need to acknowledge the growing reality of the 'glocal'). But it also plays out within the family and, as we have seen through our recognition of the importance of 'power within', within each individual.

d. Power is Contextual.

Bear in mind that an actor can be powerful in certain contexts (spheres of social interaction) yet fairly powerless in other contexts. The tribal elder can be very influential in her community, but fairly powerless in the face of the international agro-business that is exploiting some of the communities' natural resources. A political actor can be very influential within his ethnic or religious constituency, but powerless in other ethnic or religious groups. A youth activist can be very influential within his peer group, but lose all confidence when confronted with establishment lawyers etc. Therefore a power-analysis, and change strategies that are sensitive to and work with power, need to be attentive to the contextual aspects of power. This also implies that a power analysis in environment X is not simply transferable to environment Y. What is interesting to monitor and evaluate however is how power (in its manifestations and natures and in the spaces in which it is exercised….) changes over time within the same environment – and whether your advice or intervention has made a meaningful contribution to this?

3. ANALYSING AND WORKING WITH SPACES IN WHICH POWER IS EXERCISED.

Spaces for participation are not neutral, but are themselves shaped by power relations, which both surround and enter them. When examining the spaces for participation you can ask how they were created, and with whose interests and what terms of engagement. A useful distinction has been made in this regard between closed, invited and claimed/created spaces. These are not rigid categories – in the real world a constant dynamic interaction is taking place, that influences what spaces exist for which issue, who creates and controls them and who can enter them. A key issue is indeed who creates and controls them, as those who do have more power within a given space (but given that power is contextual, they may not have the same power in another space!).

➢ *Closed Spaces.*

Many decision-making spaces are closed. That is, decisions are made by a set of actors behind closed doors, without any pretense of broadening the boundaries for inclusion. Within the state, another way of conceiving these spaces is as 'provided' spaces in the sense that elites (be they bureaucrats, experts or elected representatives –with their

'advisors') make decisions and provide services to 'the people', without the need for broader consultation or involvement. Many civil society efforts focus on opening up such spaces through greater public involvement, transparency or accountability.

> ### *Invited spaces.*

As efforts are made to widen participation, to move from closed spaces to more 'open' ones, new spaces are created which may be referred to as 'invited' spaces, i.e. 'those into which people (as users, citizens or beneficiaries) are invited to participate by various kinds of authorities, be they government, supranational agencies or non-governmental organisations'. Such participation may remain 'by invitation', or can become 'by right', where it is mandated or legislated. Invited spaces may be regularised, that is they are institutionalized and ongoing, or more transient, through one-off forms of consultation. Increasingly with the rise of approaches to participatory governance, these spaces are seen at every level, from local government, to national policy and even in global policy forums.

> ### *Claimed/created spaces.*

Finally, there are the spaces which are claimed by less powerful actors from or against the power holders, or created more autonomously by them. Some authors have referred to these spaces as 'organic' spaces which emerge 'out of sets of common concerns or identifications' and 'may come into being as a result of popular mobilisation, such as around identity or issue based concerns, or may consist of spaces in which like-minded people join together in common pursuits'. Others talk of these spaces as 'third spaces' where social actors reject hegemonic space and create spaces for themselves. These spaces range from ones created by social movements and community associations, to those simply involving natural places where people gather to debate, discuss and resist, outside of the institutionalised policy arenas.
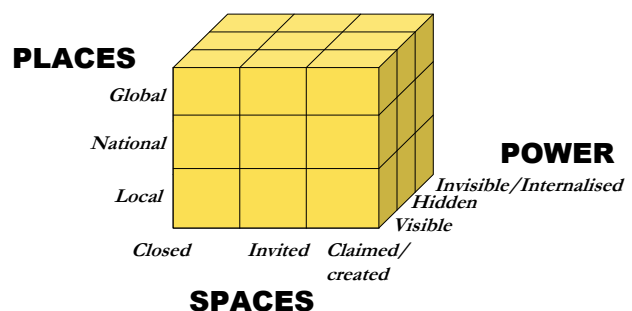
We must remember that these spaces exist in dynamic relationship to one another, and are constantly opening and closing through struggles for legitimacy and resistance, co-optation and transformation. Closed spaces may seek to restore legitimacy by creating invited spaces; similarly, invited spaces may be created from the other direction, as more autonomous people's movements attempt to use their own fora for engagement with the state. Similarly, power gained in one space, through new skills, capacity and experiences, can be used to enter and affect other spaces. From this perspective, the transformative potential of spaces for participatory governance must always be assessed in relationship to the other spaces which surround them. Creation of new institutional designs of participatory governance, in the absence of other participatory spaces which serve to provide and sustain countervailing power, might simply be captured by the already empowered elite.

The interrelationships of the spaces also create challenges for civil society strategies of engagement. To challenge 'closed' spaces, civil society organisations may serve the role of advocates, arguing for greater transparency, more democratic structures, or greater forms of public accountability. As new 'invited' spaces emerge, civil society organisations may need other strategies of how to negotiate and collaborate 'at the table', which may require shifting from more confrontational advocacy methods. At the same time, research shows that 'invited spaces' must be held open by ongoing demands of social movements, and that more autonomous spaces of participation are important for new demands to develop and to grow. Spanning these spaces – each of which involves different skills, strategies and resources – is a challenge. In reality, civil society organisations must have the 'staying power' (Pearce and Vela) to move in and out of them over time, or the capacity to build effective horizontal alliances that link strategies across the various spaces for change.

4. IN SUMMARY: THE POWER CUBE.

The various dimensions of power – and their dynamic interactions- have been visually captured in the 'power cube'. The power cube is a framework for analysing the spaces, places and forms of power and their interrelationship. Though visually presented as a cube, it is important to think about each side of the cube as a dimension or set of relationships, not as a fixed or static set of categories. Like a Rubik's cube, the blocks within the cube can be rotated – any of the blocks or sides may be used as the first point of analysis, but each dimension is linked to the other.

The "Power Cube" framework

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SOURCE MATERIALS.

This hand out draws extensively – and sometimes literally- on various resources, notably:

Bjuremalm, H. 2006: Power Analysis. Experiences and challenges. Stockholm, SIDA, Dpt. for Democracy and Social Development.

Gaventa, J. 2006: Finding the Spaces for Change: A power analysis. Institute of Development Studies, IDS Bulletin 37(6)

Miller, V. no date: Introduction to the Power Matrix. No place.

SNV Netherlands Development Organisation no date: Reader Power and Empowerment. The Hague, SNV

VeneKlasen, L. & V. Miller 2006: Dynamics of Power, Inclusion and Exclusion. In Nonprofit Online News Journal pp. 38-56

See also **www.powercube.net**

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