

# Agency and Empowerment: A Proposal for Internationally Comparable Indicators

SOLAVA IBRAHIM & SABINA ALKIRE

**ABSTRACT** *This article proposes a short list of internationally comparable indicators of individual agency and empowerment (and the corresponding survey questions). Data from these indicators would enable researchers to explore research and policy issues such as the interconnections between empowerment and economic or human development. The paper surveys definitions of agency and empowerment and adopts the definition from Amartya Sen, supplemented by Rowlands' typology. The proposed "shortlist" of indicators includes: control over personal decisions; domain-specific autonomy; household decision-making; and the ability to change aspects in one's life at the individual and communal levels. The strengths and weaknesses of each indicator are discussed, as is the need to supplement this shortlist with other variables. To ensure the feasibility of the proposal, we rely on previously fielded questions wherever possible.*

## 1. Introduction

In a village in Venganoor, Kerala, impoverished women earn a livelihood by breaking rocks into smaller rocks, which can then be used for construction purposes. Their village lies near the tourist beach of Kovalam, but the lives they lead are very distant from those of reclining tourists. When women's savings and loan organizations began to work in the area, these village women deeply valued a new-found set of skills and confidence that might be called a kind of empowerment. Describing their situation in 2006, they said, "we have greater real 'swathanthreeyam' (freedom). When we used to go to any bank or office, we were afraid. We did not know what to say or how to behave . . . but now we do. We can talk to anyone in malayalam and can say yes or no in English".<sup>1</sup>

One might suspect that these women are not alone in valuing their enhanced freedom to take action in one or more spheres of life. Amartya Sen observed that poor people regularly value "unrestrained participation in political and social activities"<sup>2</sup> and lament its absence. Concern for people's agency plays a central role in Sen's human development and capability approach: "Greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves, and also to influence the world, and these matters are central to the process of development".<sup>3</sup>

---

Solava Ibrahim, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK. Sabina Alkire, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK. We are grateful for the comments of Valery Chirkov, Ed Deci, Mridul Eapen, Sunita Kishor and Richard Ryan on aspects of this paper; to participants of the OPHI launch, particularly Grace Bediako, Stephan Klasen, Deepa Narayan and Michael Walton; and for the energetic and timely research assistance of Afsan Bhadelia; all errors remain our own.

ISSN 1360-0818 print/ISSN 1469-9966 online/07/040379-25

© 2007 International Development Centre, Oxford

DOI: 10.1080/13600810701701897

**Table 1.** Concepts of empowerment

Study	Definition or concept of empowerment
Albertyn (2001)	Effective empowerment must occur at each of three levels: micro (attitude, feelings and skills), interface (participation and action immediately around the individual) and macro (beliefs, action and effects)
Alkire (2005)	Empowerment is an increase in certain kinds of agency that are deemed particularly instrumental to the situation at hand. Thus, I am choosing to assume that empowerment is a subset of agency, and that increases in empowerment would be reflected in increased agency (but not necessarily vice versa) (Alkire, 2005, p. 4)
Alsop <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Empowerment is defined as a group's or individual's capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (Alsop <i>et al.</i> , 2006, p. 10)
Appleyard (2002)	Empowering people to make their own decisions, rather than be passive objects of choices made on their behalf. It focuses on empowering all people to claim their right to opportunities and services made available through pro-poor development (Bartlett, 2004, p. 54)
Bennet (2002)	<i>Empowerment</i> is used to characterize approaches based on <i>social mobilization</i> . A key element in most social mobilization approaches is helping poor and socially excluded individuals realize the power they gain from collective action. Often social mobilization approaches work "from below" to create voice and demand for change among diverse groups of poor and socially excluded citizens (Bartlett, 2004, p. 54)
Chambers (1993)	Empowerment means that people, especially poorer people, are enabled to take more control over their lives, and secure a better livelihood with ownership and control of productive assets as one key element. Decentralization and empowerment enable local people to exploit the diverse complexities of their own conditions, and to adapt to rapid change (Bartlett, 2004, p. 55)
Craig & Mayo (1995)	Empowerment is about collective community, and ultimately class conscientization, to understand critically reality in order to use the power which even the powerless do possess, so as to challenge the powerful and ultimately to transform the reality through conscious political struggles (cited in Oakley, 2001, p. 4)
Friedmann (1992)	An alternative development involves a process of social and political empowerment whose long term objective is to rebalance the structure of power within society by make state action more accountable, strengthening the powers of civil society in the management of their own affairs and making corporate business more socially responsible (cited in Oakley, 2001, p. 3)
Gootaert (2005)	Empowerment falls in three categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•making state institutions more responsive to poor people</li> <li>•removing social barriers</li> <li>•building social institutions and social capital (Grootaert, 2005, p. 310)</li> </ul>
Grootaert (2003)	Expanding assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives

Jackson (1994)	The process by which people, organizations or groups who are powerless: (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context; (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives; (c) exercise their control without infringing upon the right of others; and (d) support the empowerment of others in the community (cited in Rowlands, 1997, p. 15)
Kabeer (2001)	Empowerment ... refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them (Bartlett, 2004, p. 57)
Khwaja (2005)	Empowerment consists of two components: information and influence, which together allow individuals to identify and express their own preferences, and provides them with the bargaining power to make informed decisions (Khwaja, 2005, pp. 273–274)
Lokshin & Ravallion (2003)	Taking actions that selectively empower those with little power to redress power inequality
Malena (2003)	Enabling or giving power to (whom) to do (what)
Malhotra <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Enhancing assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions that affect them
Mayoux (2000a); (DFID)	Women's empowerment is defined as "individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice, and to fulfill their potential has fallen equally to members of society" (Mayoux, 2000a, p. 4)
Mason & Smith (2003)	Empowerment is about "the extent to which some categories of people are able to control their own destinies, even when their interests are opposed by those of other people with whom they interact (Mason & Smith, 2003, p. 1)
McMillan <i>et al.</i> (1995)	Gaining influence over events and outcomes of importance
Moser (2003)	Expanding assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives
Moser (1991)	While the empowerment approach acknowledges the importance for women of increasing their power, it seeks to identify power less in terms of domination over others and more in terms of the capacity of women to increase their self-reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through ability to gain control over crucial material and non-material sources. It places less emphasis than the equity approach on increasing women's status relative to men, but seeks to empower women through the redistribution of power within, as well as between, societies (cited in Oakley, 2001, 4)
Narayan (2005)	The expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives (Narayan, 2002, p. vi, 2005, p. 5)
Oxaal & Baden (1997)	Empowerment cannot be defined in terms of specific activities or end results because it involves a process whereby women can freely analyse, develop and voice their needs and interests, without them being pre-defined, or imposed from above, by planners or other social actors (Oxaal & Baden, 1997, p. 6)
Oxfam (1995)	Empowerment involves challenging the forms of oppression which compel millions of people to play a part in their society on terms which are inequitable, or in ways which deny their human rights (Oxfam, 1995, in Oxaal & Baden, 1997, p. 2)

Table 1. *Continued*

Study	Definition or concept of empowerment
Rowlands (1997)	“Empowerment is more than participation in decision-making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions” (Rowlands, 1997, p. 14)
Spreitzer (1995)	Intrapersonal empowerment as the component of psychological empowerment that deals with cognitive elements. Other components are interactional (thinking about and relating to the environment) and behavioural (taking action and engaging issues)
Strandburg (2001)	Empowerment can overall be defined as all those processes where women take control and ownership of their lives. Control and ownership require an array of opportunities to choose among and this understanding of empowerment overlaps with the concept of human development when defined as “a process of enlarging people’s choices”. Both concepts describe processes, but where human development entails enlarging choices, empowerment is the process of acquiring the ability to choose among these enlarged choices . . . (Bartlett, 2004, p. 59)
Van Eyken (1991)	Empowerment is an intentional and ongoing dynamic process centred on the local community, involving mutual dignity, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking a valid share of resources gain greater access to and control over those resources, though the exercise of an increased leverage of power (cited in Oakley, 2001, p. 16)
WDR (2000/2001)	Empowerment as the process of “enhancing the capacity of poor people to influence the state institutions that affect their lives, by strengthening their participation in political processes and local decision-making. And it means removing the barriers—political, legal and social—that work against particular groups and building the assets of poor people to enable them to engage effectively in markets” (World Bank, 2001, p. 39)

Sources that draw on poor people's own perceptions of their situation often report that a lack of agency is central to their description of ill-being (Narayan *et al.*, 2000a and 2000b). For example, a participant in the *Voices of the Poor* from El Mataria, Egypt, explained the importance of helping one another—as so many people do across the globe: “Whenever there is a crisis, the fishermen help each other by collecting money for the person needing help”.<sup>4</sup> In Ghana, a poor person said: “you know good but you cannot do good”.<sup>5</sup> A woman from the community of Borborema Brazil argued “the rich one is someone who says, ‘I am going to do it’ and does it”.<sup>6</sup> Leticia from Ecuador explained how her ability to participate in household decision-making rendered her empowered: “my opportunity is that I have free space, to decide for myself, no longer dependent on others. For me, this is a source of pride, my husband asking me [my advice] ... now there isn't this machismo ... there is mutual respect ... together we decide”.<sup>7</sup>

What is also evident from the examples above is that agency or empowerment can be experienced with respect to different tasks—the ability to have a conversation in the bank, the ability to help others, the ability to make decisions in one's family, or a general ability to plan effectively. In the terms that we shall be using, agency and empowerment can be described and measured with respect to different *domains* of life. For this reason, we shall argue that most measures of agency and empowerment should likewise be *domain-specific*.<sup>8</sup> Different kinds of empowerment may be, however, interconnected with, and instrumental to, a number of other positive changes, and a research agenda that explores these might be of considerable value.

This article proposes a small set of indicators of agency, and the corresponding questions that could be added to individual or household surveys to generate internationally comparable data. In order to select conceptually and technically valid indicators, Section 2 considers, briefly, the different *definitions of agency and empowerment* in the literature and the different kinds of measures that the definitions would generate. Section 3 proposes a very small number of *survey questions* for regular inclusion in household surveys. Most of the questions are not new; they have been fielded previously, strengthening the case that the proposal is feasible and realistic, given the time and training constraints under which such data are collected. Section 4 investigates various possible research hypotheses regarding the instrumental value of empowerment, namely how “empowering people” might be an effective investment in health, education, governance, pro-poor growth and psychological/subjective well-being. Section 5 concludes.

## 2. Empowerment: Concept and Definitions

The concept of empowerment is related to terms such as agency, autonomy, self-direction, self-determination, liberation, participation, mobilization and self-confidence.<sup>9</sup> It is also a debated term, which has been ascribed a wide variety of definitions and meanings in various socio-economic contexts.<sup>10</sup> This section will review some of the common definitions of empowerment and identify their commonalities as well as areas of divergence. Table 1 provides a list of 29 of the many definitions of empowerment in current use.

Alsop and others describe empowerment as having two components.<sup>11</sup> The first component might be thought of as an expansion of *agency*—the ability to act on behalf of what you value and have reason to value.<sup>12</sup> The second component of empowerment focuses on the institutional environment, which offers people the opportunity to exert agency fruitfully. The focus is on the *opportunity structure* that provides what might be

considered preconditions for effective agency. Of course these are not mutually exclusive; the shift is one of emphasis. Clearly, a process of empowerment is incomplete unless it attends to people's abilities to act, the institutional structure, and the various non-institutional changes that are instrumental to increased agency. While acknowledging the distinct importance of institutional structures, this paper seeks measures related to the first component, i.e. expansion of "agency". The next sections present each type of empowerment more fully.

### 2.1 *Empowerment: An Expansion of Agency*

Sen defines agency as "what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important".<sup>13</sup> In his account, which we adopt, agency is intrinsically valued: "Acting freely and being able to choose are, in this view, directly conducive to well-being...".<sup>14</sup> Agency, a kind of process freedom, is concerned with *processes*: "For example, it may be thought, reasonably enough, that the procedure of free decision by the person himself (no matter how successful the person is in getting what he would like to achieve) is an important requirement of freedom".<sup>15</sup> Put simply, an agent is "someone who acts and brings about change".<sup>16</sup> A further and occasionally explicit assumption in Sen's account is that agency will be socially beneficial, that agents advance goals people value and have reason to value. For example, Drèze and Sen's *Hunger and Public Action* concludes as follows: "It is, as we have tried to argue and illustrate, essential to see the public not merely as 'the patient' whose well-being commands attention, but also as 'the agent' whose actions can transform society".<sup>17</sup>

A number of other authors articulate similar concepts, although terms vary. Maholtra explained that "among the various concepts and terms we encountered in the literature on empowerment, 'agency' probably comes closest to capturing what the majority of writers are referring to".<sup>18</sup> Kabeer described agency as related to the ability of an individual to set his own goals and act upon them. The process involves bargaining and negotiation as well as resistance and manipulation.<sup>19</sup> Increasing agency in one domain may have positive "spillover" effects on agency in other domains, and perhaps also on other aspects of well-being<sup>20</sup>—but it also may not.

A number of authors frame empowerment as an increase in power, understood as control or a real ability to effect change.<sup>21</sup> Empowerment is about "the extent to which some categories of people are able to control their own destinies, even when their interests are opposed by those of the other people with whom they interact".<sup>22</sup> Uphoff (2005) distinguishes "power resources", i.e. the accumulated, invested and exchanged assets from the "power results", i.e. the activities that are achieved by using these resources.<sup>23</sup> An empowerment process, he argues, needs to provide access to these "resources", and also to allow people to use them effectively to gain more "power". Oakley differentiates two "types" of power: power to cause radical change and power—in a Freirian sense—as the ability to do and to gain control. He argues that power can be either "variable-sum" or "zero-sum". The former refers to a process through which the "powerless can be empowered without altering the nature and the levels of power already held by existing powerful groups"; the latter argues that "any gain in power by one group inevitably results in a reduction of the power exercised by others".<sup>24</sup> Rowlands introduced four categorizations of power: power *over* (ability to resist manipulation); power *to* (creating new possibilities); power *with* (acting in a group); and power *from within* (enhancing self-respect

and self-acceptance).<sup>25</sup> We draw on Rowlands' categorizations below. A conceptual concern with the pure "power" definitions is that these tend not to make explicit assumptions such as that the power will be used in socially beneficial rather than socially harmful ways, or that empowered individuals will need to co-operate to achieve joint aims, or that even empowered people may be unable to attain certain goals.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.2 *Preconditions to Exert Agency*

Other definitions of empowerment focus not only upon the person's freedom to act, but upon the concrete material, social and institutional preconditions required to exert agency. In Adam Smith's time, the ability to go about without shame was precluded if one lacked a linen shirt and leather shoes—these formed the material preconditions for self-respect. Whereas the definitions above would undergird efforts to try to measure agency directly; these second definitions would catalyse a search for indicators that measure particular material or social attributes, akin to linen and leather, that differentiate agency-rich from agency-poor persons. As is evident, these will vary greatly across contexts.

A widely cited definition of empowerment of this kind is that of the *World Development Report 2000/2001*, which views empowerment as the process of "enhancing the capacity of poor people to influence the state institutions that affect their lives, by strengthening their participation in political processes and local decision-making. And it means removing the barriers—political, legal and social—that work against particular groups and building the assets of poor people to enable them to engage effectively in markets".<sup>27</sup> Narayan (2002) defines empowerment as "the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives".<sup>28</sup> Narayan stresses four main elements of empowerment: access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability and local organizational capacity.<sup>29</sup> Agency is influenced by people's individual (material, human, social and psychological) and collective (voice, organization, representation and identity) assets and capabilities.<sup>30</sup> Alsop focuses on the importance of choice and defines empowerment as a "group's or individual's capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes".<sup>31</sup> She explains that people's agency can be constrained by the "opportunity structure", i.e. the institutional climate (information, inclusion/participation, accountability, local organizational capacity) and the social and political structures (openness, competition and conflict) in which people live.<sup>32</sup> The opportunity structure is affected by three main influences: the permeability of the state; the extent of elite fragmentation; and the state's implementation capacity.<sup>33</sup> An effective exercise of agency entails the overcoming of significant institutional and informal obstacles, including those mentioned above, as well as the domination of existing elite groups or of unresponsive public programmes.<sup>34</sup> The exercise of human agency therefore requires a "change in the rules of the game", i.e. the formal and informal institutions that condition the effectiveness of human agency.<sup>35</sup>

Other authors have drawn attention to additional intervening variables, such as information, mobilization, ownership, or moral collective action. Khwaja (2005) argues that any "workable" definition of empowerment needs to include two main aspects: influence and information, which allow people to express their preferences and have an effective impact on particular decisions.<sup>36</sup> Empowerment is also based on social mobilization that gives people voice and allows them to demand change.<sup>37</sup> Viewing

empowerment from the bottom up, Chambers (1993) describes it as a process that gives the poor control over their lives as well as ownership of productive assets to secure a better livelihood.<sup>38</sup> Friedmann (1992) defines empowerment as a bottom-up process that originates from moral relations, territory-based social formations, and the involvement of individuals in socially and politically relevant actions.<sup>39</sup> Other definitions focus on moral aspects of empowerment, such as fulfilment, human rights, and the removal of oppression and injustice.<sup>40</sup> Many argue that empowerment requires essential economic resources that improve people's opportunities to gain a better income. Accordingly, a number of studies focus on the role of micro-credit in empowering marginalized social groups, especially women.<sup>41</sup>

Authors also emphasize different intervening processes that generate an increase in empowerment, such as *democratization* and *participation*. The UNDP's *Human Development Report (1995)* argues that to be empowered people need to participate fully in decisions and processes that shape their lives. Empowerment in the political domain is often related to democratization and political participation, as well as the strengthening of grassroots and civil society organizations and the participation of marginalized social groups in national and local politics.<sup>42</sup>

Having reviewed various definitions of empowerment and suggested its potential value, Section 3 discusses the methodological challenges that confront measurement of empowerment, and the indicators and questions that were selected in the effort to measure this complex topic.

### 3. Selecting Indicators

#### 3.1 Methodological Challenges

As Narayan has outlined (2005), methodological issues involved in selecting indicators of empowerment include whether to measure aspects that are intrinsic or instrumental; context-specific or universal; individual or collective; whether to include psychological determinants; the appropriate unit of analysis; issues of causality and whether to collect quantitative or qualitative data. After articulating these issues, this section goes on to propose the indicators and questions included in our shortlist. The proposed shortlist is not meant to be conclusive but rather to spark further discussion and debate.

*3.1.1 Intrinsic or instrumental.* A first issue is the following: Should we measure the empowerment people *value* or the powers they *have* even if they do not value these? For example, a woman may have the power to make household decisions regarding major purchases, but this is because her husband is chronically depressed, and she may rather wish that the decisions were made jointly by an engaged and responsible partner. In Sen's definition, then, agency is the ability to act on behalf of what you value *and* have reason to value. However, it is only possible to measure one of these at a time—either an indicator can access the subjective or positionally objective views of the agent regarding her agency, or an indicator can measure whether she enjoys agency of certain kinds that are presumed to be valuable. The proposed survey questions measure both. The questions on personal and household decision-making relate to the power the respondent has, while the questions on motivation from Ryan and Deci capture the agency the respondent *values*.<sup>43</sup>



*3.1.2 Universal or context-specific.* The second issue concerns the comparability of indicators and the extent to which they should be universal or context-specific. Although both kinds of data are needed, this study seeks to identify indicators that can be compared across contexts and across time—which entails an awareness of how reliable indicators of empowerment in one context or point in time may be irrelevant in another.<sup>44</sup> A prior question, of course, is whether it is *possible* to find meaningful international indicators of empowerment at all. For our purposes this is a research question that the collection of such potentially comparable data alone can illuminate. However, it is also clear that internationally comparable indicators will be insufficient for many purposes, because they do not provide information on the socio-cultural environment, including culture and embedded social relationships.<sup>45</sup> Kabeer (2001) argues that Bourdieu’s concept of “doxa”, i.e. “the aspects of tradition and culture which are so taken-for-granted that they have become internalized”, is important. Internalizing subordinate social status, for example, affects human agency and the ability to make choices.<sup>46</sup> The contextual nature of empowerment and problems of adaptive preferences pose a major challenge to agency measurement,<sup>47</sup> and context-dependent measures of empowerment may be useful in many cases to complement internationally comparable measures.<sup>48</sup>

*3.1.3 Level of application.* Should indicators of empowerment be measured at the individual household, group, community, local government, national government, or global level?<sup>49</sup> This study focuses on the individual level and may be supplemented with data from other units of analysis.

*3.1.4 Individual or collective.* Can we measure group agency using individual-level data? The proposed module emphasizes the individual aspects of empowerment but includes one question to measure the extent to which individuals feel that “people like themselves” are able to change aspects of community life. Measuring group agency would require a separate survey instrument.

*3.1.5 Dynamics.* This survey focuses on the level of empowerment, not on perceptions of whether or not it has increased, or the process by which it has come about. To measure empowerment dynamics properly would require panel data, as well as indicators that might capture the dynamic processes of change.<sup>50</sup> Smulovitz & Walton (2003) argue that three types of information need to be gathered to capture the empowerment process: (1) factors affecting the capacities of individuals to act as agents; (2) the actual exercise of agency; and (3) influences on the institutional context.<sup>51</sup> This study focuses on the second of these alone.

*3.1.6 Establishing causality.* A further question relates to what indicators would be adequate for testing causality, which will be essential in testing whether empowerment is instrumental to development outcomes.<sup>52</sup> Our research questions explore causal connections between empowerment and other domains of poverty, and articulate the need to control for endogeneity.<sup>53</sup>

*3.1.7 Who measures: self or others.* Empowerment has not only multiple definitions, but also objective and subjective dimensions.<sup>54</sup> This raises the questions of whether to use data that draw on the perceptions of the poor, and if so, how to use these data so that they

strengthen rather than discredit rigorous analysis. The proposed survey uses both objective and subjective questions. The subjective data will need to be analysed differently, and their interpretation will require an understanding of influences such as adaptive preferences. However, we argue that when these potential biases are examined and, if necessary, corrected, they are suitable for analysis.

*3.1.8 Quantitative or qualitative data.* This survey proposes quantitative data, but we recognize of course that qualitative and participatory data are necessary to triangulate, guide and deepen the analysis in many contexts.<sup>55</sup>

Having clarified the limited characteristics of our focal measures, the next section proposes a shortlist of indicators and questions, and justifies their selection.

### 3.2 Criteria for Selecting Indicators

This section proposes a small, robust, internationally comparable list of empowerment indicators that can address key research questions. The following criteria were used to choose suitable indicators for the inclusion in individual or household surveys. First, given the context of our study, the chosen indicators should be relevant to the lives of the poor and the areas in which they suffer from a “power deficit”. Second, the indicators need to be *internationally comparable*. This is particularly important as there is a gap in the literature on comparative empowerment studies.<sup>56</sup> Third, the indicators need to assess not only the instrumental but also the *intrinsic* aspects of empowerment. Fourth, as empowerment is a process, it is essential to select indicators that would be able to identify *changes in agency and empowerment* over time. Fifth, the choice of the indicators shortlist draws on *experience with particular indicators*. That is, these indicators have previously been tested and found to be adequate measures of empowerment for research purposes, and their shortcomings have been identified. It goes without saying that the indicators need to be scrutinized on standard conditions of accuracy, validity and reliability.

Based on these criteria, and drawing on Rowlands’ typology, we propose indicators for four possible exercises of agency whose increase could lead to empowerment: choice, control, change and communal belonging.

- (1) Empowerment as control (power over): *Control over Personal Decisions*.
- (2) Empowerment as choice (power to): *Domain-specific Autonomy and Household Decision-making*.
- (3) Empowerment in community (power with): *Changing Aspects in one’s Life [Individual Level]*.
- (4) Empowerment as change (power from within): *Changing Aspects in one’s life [Communal Level]*.

The set of indicators that we propose focuses on empowerment as expansion of “agency”.

For many analyses, this shortlist will need to be complemented by specific institutional indicators related to the domains and issues outlined above as preconditions of empowerment.

*3.2.1 Indicator 1. “Power over/control” Control over Personal Decisions.* The first indicator reflects control over personal decisions. These indicators seek to assess to what

**Table 2.** Indicator of control over personal decisions

---

Q1. How much control do you feel you have in making personal decisions that affect your everyday activities?

Control over all decisions [5]      Control over most decisions [4]  
 Control over some decisions [3]      Control over very few decisions [2]  
 No control at all [1]

---

Source: World Bank *Moving out of Poverty* survey.

extent the agency of individuals and social groups is constrained by local power relations and patriarchal social hierarchies.<sup>57</sup> The question on “control over personal decisions”, which measures the extent to which the individual has control over everyday activities, has been adopted from the “Moving out of Poverty” survey that has been conducted and tested by the World Bank in about 10–15 countries (Table 2).

The next two indicators focus on household decision-making and domain-specific autonomy; they are both concerned with the perceived ability of respondents to make decisions in their household and the factors underlying the decision-making process, i.e. the extent to which decision-making is truly autonomous.

*3.2.2 Indicator 2A. “Power to/choice” Household Decision-making.* The household is regularly, although not invariably, a core social institution. “The household is often a fundamental building block of society, and the place where individuals confront basic livelihood concerns, norms, values, power and privilege”.<sup>58</sup> Decision-making with respect to different aspects of life is an important indicator of power relations, particularly as reflected through the division of gender roles within the household. This indicator seeks to measure intra-household decision-making for several reasons. First, although evidence is mixed, some studies have identified this indicator as useful (Table 3). Second, the indicator has also been used previously by various researchers in a number of countries (Table 4), suggesting its international comparability—although naturally some problems have been identified. Third, participatory studies of the experience of poverty in different contexts—particularly of women—report that their participation in decision-making within the household is crucial for their well-being.

The chosen indicator clarifies who usually makes household decisions, and if the respondent could influence these if he or she wished. It therefore addresses the first and second empowerment levels, i.e. the existence of choice in the household and the actual use of this choice. Data on this indicator have often been gathered simply by determining who makes decisions. However, this standard question ignores the possibility that the individual might decide to delegate this decision-making either because he/she is busy or not interested to make such a decision. For clarity we have, drawing on Alsop *et al.*, (2006), also added a second question that aims to distinguish between disempowerment and an empowered division of labour in which the respondent could influence the decision if he/she wished. The questions are as given in Table 5.

The “domains” of this question were selected as follows. First, we considered the full set of domains in which survey questions have been fielded and/or studies have been accomplished. Second, we drew upon the elements of empowerment that seem to be regularly identified by poor people in participatory studies. Third, we focused on a subset of domains that could be altered if it were found that a significant area was missing, or if a country wished to emphasize a particular domain further. In this domain, the “control over

**Table 3.** Studies proposing indicator: “Decision-making within Household”

Study	Recommendation of the indicator
Malhotra & Schuler (2005)	Identified “domestic decision-making” as indicator at the household level within the social and cultural dimension of empowerment
Malhotra <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Participation in domestic decision-making identified as an indicator in the familial and interpersonal domain
Parveen & Leonhäuser (2004)	Participation within the household in the familial domain
Roy & Niranjana (2004)	Involvement in decision-making in the decision-making domain
Schuler & Hashemi (1994)	“Status and decision-making power within the household” has been identified as a domain
CIDA (1997)	“Control over fertility decisions” (e.g. number of children and number of abortions) identified as indicator within the social domain
Jejeebhoy (1995)	“Decision-making economy” as one dimension of women’s empowerment
Kishor (2000)	“Sharing roles and decision-making”
Holland & Brook (2004); Alsop & Heinsohn (2005); Alsop <i>et al.</i> (2006)	“Score for distribution of household decision-making power” as indicator within society domain at the local level
Mayoux (2000a)	“Changes in underlying resource and power constraints at household level” and “control over parameters of household consumption and other valued areas of household decision-making including fertility decisions” (p. 21) within the “power over” dimension of empowerment
Sen (1999b)	“Household work and decision-making”
Bartlett (2004)	“The household” identified as one domain among three domains of decision-making

**Table 4.** Studies using indicator: “Decision-making within Household”

Study	Location
Frankenberg & Thomas (2001)	Indonesia
Grasmuck & Espinal (2000)	Dominican Republic
Hashemi <i>et al.</i> (1996)	Bangladesh
Jejeebhoy (2000)	India
Kabeer (1997)	Bangladesh
Malhotra & Mather (1997)	Sri Lanka
Mason (1998)	Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines
Kishor (2000)	Egypt
Mason & Smith (2000)	Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines
Schuler & Hashemi (1994);	Bangladesh
Schuler <i>et al.</i> (1997, p. 25)	Bangladesh
Malhotra <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Participation in domestic decision-making identified as an indicator in the familial and interpersonal domain
Hindin (2000)	Zimbabwe

income” question is the single most widely used existing indicator of empowerment, and is included in Demographic and Health Surveys (DHSs) and Surveys of the Status of Women and Fertility (SWAF). Nevertheless, we were reluctant to propose only this single question for the following reasons. First, many respondents might not earn income and hence their responses will be “missing”. Second, in single-headed households, the individuals might have “full control over income”; however, he/she might be oppressed or disempowered in other areas and asking about several domains will provide a better assessment. Third, this standard question asks only who decides, whereas given divisions of labour and interest within a household, a more “comprehensive” household decision-making question would ascertain the ability of the individual to make these choices if he/she wanted to.<sup>59</sup>

*3.2.3 Indicator 2B. “Power to/choice”: Domain-specific Autonomy.* This section proposes an indicator of positionally objective autonomy. There are several reasons for this proposal, which relate to the shortcomings of the household decision-making question and similar questions. First, in some cases the constraints to agency arise from sources outside the household, and the commonly used question would overlook this. Second, the household decision-making question does not access the respondent’s own values regarding the situation—it establishes only if the respondent has choice. Third, the

**Table 5.** Indicators of household decision-making

Q1. When decisions are made regarding the following aspects of household life, who is it that normally takes the decision?

- a. Minor household expenditures
- b. What to do if you have a serious health problem
- c. How to protect yourself from violence
- d. Whether and how to express religious faith
- e. What kind of tasks you will do

Use following codes: Respondent [1] spouse [2] respondent and spouse jointly [3] someone else [4] jointly with someone else [5] other [6]

Source: For question 1, see Table 1. For question 2, see Alsop *et al.* (2006).

commonly used indicator has a limited sensitivity to changes over time. For this reason, we introduced a further three-question indicator of autonomy, which would be aggregated into a weighted index.

This indicator enquires about the extent to which a person feels his/her action in each domain is motivated by a fear of punishment or hope for reward. It then asks the extent to which the same action was motivated by a desire to avoid shame or gain praise. Finally, it asks the extent to which it was motivated by its consonance with the respondent's interests and values. All of these may be true to varying extents, and they give rise to a weighted measure of the degree to which the person regards him/herself as the authentic "author" of his/her action in this domain, and to what extent he/she is coerced or swayed by others.<sup>60</sup>

Unlike the previous proposed indicators, this indicator arose not from development-related social sciences, but from psychology. By definition, it has clear affinities with Sen's approach; the authors describe autonomy as follows:<sup>61</sup>

a person is autonomous when his or her behavior is experienced as willingly enacted and when he or she fully endorses the actions in which he or she is engaged and/or the values expressed by them. People are therefore most autonomous when they act in accord with their authentic interests or integrated values and desires.

(Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan *et al.*, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1985)<sup>62</sup>

Since the ability to measure autonomy accurately across cultures is also deeply contested within psychology, this indicator has been challenged and subsequently tested and used extensively internationally, including in developing countries, and has been shown to be robust across individualist and collectivist, and vertical and horizontal, cultures (Chirkov *et al.*, 2003, 2005). Table 6 lists some of the cross-cultural studies that either explore or use the indicator.

**Table 6.** Studies using and/or exploring Ryan–Deci's indicator of autonomy

Study	Location
Alkire <i>et al.</i> (Mimeo)	India, El Salvador, Egypt, Turkey
Chirkov & Ryan (2001)	Russia, USA
Chirkov <i>et al.</i> (2003)	South Korea, Russia, Turkey, USA
Chirkov <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Canada, Brazil
Ryan & Deci (2001)	Bulgaria
Downie <i>et al.</i> (2004)	Tricultural individuals in Canada of over 35 ethnicities
Grouzet <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Australia, Bulgaria, China, China, Hong Kong, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Romania, South Korea, Spain, USA
Rijavec <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Croatia
Schmuck <i>et al.</i> (2000)	Germany, USA
Sheldon <i>et al.</i> (2001)	USA, South Korea
Sheldon <i>et al.</i> (2004)	China, South Korea, USA
Vansteenkiste <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Taiwan China

The question is domain-specific, thus the three motivations are explored for each domain—using the same domains as the household decision-making question (Table 7).

The most serious potential difficulty with this indicator is also the greatest strength: the fact that the indicator captures the “positionally objective” perception of the respondent—a view that is coming “from” a delineated place such as a set of beliefs about what an empowered woman, or man, or ethnic person, does.<sup>63</sup> Such beliefs influence people’s actions, and also have practical relevance for development activities. Understanding “how a person sees” a particular situation—in this case empowerment—is quite important.

Adaptive preferences are in some ways distorted, affecting the interpretation of subjective data. For instance, using the present indicator, in Kerala, more educated women reported a “lower” level of autonomy than might be expected (Alkire *et al.*, Mimeo). Assuming this finding arises from habituation effects, the data should be in some sense “cleansed” of this effect prior to its use in hypothesis testing.

While we support the direct use of objective information for policy purposes, it may none the less be valuable to obtain information on people’s views, and interpret them carefully to inform the analysis. First, it will directly answer the question of whether, at this time, the respondent *values* each domain of autonomy or empowerment (which, implicitly, he or she might have reason to value). A second reason is that it may guide policy-makers in local government to increase women’s autonomy, either by investing in their “conscientization”, or by direct interventions to assist in change, such as providing

**Table 7.** Indicator of domain-specific autonomy

---

Now I am going to describe three reasons why you do these activities, and ask you to tell me how true each one is.

Q1. How true would it be to say that your actions with respect to \_\_\_\_\_ [the domain] are motivated by a desire to avoid punishment or to gain reward?

Codes: Completely true [4] somewhat true [3] not very true [2] not at all true [1]  
 Source: Ryan & Deci (adapted)

a. Minor Household Expenditures  
 b. What to do if you have a serious health problem  
 c. How to protect yourself from violence  
 d. Whether and how to express religious faith  
 e. What kind of tasks you will do

Q2. How true would it be to say that your actions with respect to \_\_\_\_\_ [the domain] are motivated by a desire to avoid blame, or so that other people speak well of you?

Q3. How true would it be to say that your actions with respect to \_\_\_\_\_ [the domain] are motivated by and reflect your own values and/or interests?  
 Domains:

---

training for advocacy for childcare facilities and maternity leave on jobs. However, choosing between these options requires an understanding of the women's own "positionally objective" views.

Thus, the Ryan–Deci Autonomy indicator is proposed with considerable energy, as it has been tested vigorously across countries in psychology, but not yet used in development. Its inclusion could introduce some interesting and potentially useful insights.

*3.2.4 Indicator 3. "Power from within/change": Changing Aspects in one's Life [Individual Level].* In addition to having control and choice, empowerment also involves the ability to change. The third indicator addresses this aspect of empowerment, i.e. the power from within, or the ability to induce change in one's life, thus enhancing one's own self-acceptance. The proposed questions have not been widely tested, however, they have been adopted from studies conducted in India and El Salvador to measure human agency.<sup>64</sup> The first question assesses the *willingness* of the individual to change different aspects in his/her life. The second question identifies the different aspects that the individual wishes to change according to the values that he/she values and has reason to value. This question thus examines the "*domains*" in which the individual wishes to act as an agent. The third question assesses the individual's *ability* to contribute to this change, i.e. his/her actual ability to be an agent. The questions are as given in Table 8.

*3.2.5 Indicator 4. "Power with/community": Changing Aspects in Communal Life [Communal Level].* Some scholars argue that the poor are usually empowered in group settings, although others are reluctant to view communal belonging as a means of empowerment, arguing that unequal power relations within groups can in fact be disempowering. To surmount this objection, we suggest including a question about the ability of people to change things collectively in their community *if they want to*. The main unit of analysis remains the individual or the household, however, we ask the respondents to assess the general level of empowerment that they perceive in their communities, i.e. the *power* gained *with* other community members. The proposed question is also adopted from the study on human agency conducted in India and El Salvador.<sup>65</sup> The question is as given in Table 9.

Finally, having proposed a series of indicators and questions to measure several key aspects of empowerment, mostly at the individual level but with some effort to capture

**Table 8.** Indicator of changing aspects in one's life

---

Q1. Would you like to change anything in your life?	Yes [1]	No [0]
Q2. What three thing(s) would you most like to change?		
A:		
B:		
C:		
Q3. Who do you think will contribute most to any change in your own life?		
[Enumerator: list up to 2 reasons]		
Myself [1] my family [2] our group [3] our community [4] the local government [5] the state government [6] other (specify)_____		

---

Source: Alsop *et al.* (2006).



**Table 9.** Indicator of changing aspects in communal life

---

Q1. Do you feel that people like yourself can generally change things in your community if they want to?
Yes, very easily [5]
Yes, fairly easily [4]
Yes, but with a little difficulty [3]
Yes, but with a great deal of difficulty [2]
No, not at all. [1]

---

Source: Alsop *et al.* (2006).

community dimensions, we now put forth several concrete hypotheses that the resulting data could help us to address.

#### 4. Claims, Hypotheses and Research Questions

Empowerment is often argued to be instrumentally important for achieving positive development outcomes, such as improved incomes and assets for the poor, better local and national governance, more inclusive social services, more equitable access to markets, better access to justice and legal aid as well as stronger civil society and strengthened poor people's organizations.<sup>66</sup> Often these claims have been put forward without the benefit of a large and well-established body of empirical research. The data that would be generated by the survey questions would improve our understanding of interconnections between variables (e.g. empowerment and income, governance, health and nutrition outcomes) in different contexts, and of their durability across time. In order to clarify the research questions that empowerment data could engage, this section will briefly put forth some hypotheses that authors have proposed regarding the instrumental efficacy of empowerment.

##### 4.1 Empowerment and Human Development: A virtuous circle

Sen makes a strong claim for increasing the agency of deprived people to render them able and motivated to be effective agents of their own human development (Sen, 1999b). Various authors continue to explore these alleged interconnections. For example, women's income in Brazil is spent more on human capital investments and is associated with greater nutrient intake and better child health (Thomas, 1997; Thomas, 1990, cited in Malhotra *et al.*, 2002, p. 48). Similarly, investment priorities of politically empowered women differ from those of men: in India, "women are more likely to participate if the leader of the council is a woman and invest more in infrastructure that is directly relevant to rural women's needs (water, fuel, health, roads, etc.); men invest more in education" (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2001). Information on the intervening variable of "empowerment" thus may help explain different observed patterns of decision-making.

##### 4.2 Empowerment and Project Effectiveness

The second hypothesis to probe empirically is whether individual empowerment may promote project effectiveness at the local level. Local participation in development projects is argued to exert a strong impact on development outcomes. *Empowerment in*

*Practice* contains five case studies of development projects that sought to empower local communities, e.g. through participatory budgeting in Brazil,<sup>67</sup> women's development initiatives in Ethiopia,<sup>68</sup> community-based education in Honduras<sup>69</sup> and conflict management in Indonesia.<sup>70</sup> These projects allowed the poor to challenge the clientalistic power relations in their communities, enhanced women's empowerment, provided voice to excluded social groups and allowed them to participate in local decision-making processes. In each study, authors argue that empowerment contributed to better development outcomes.

#### 4.3 Empowerment and Governance

A third claim the empowerment data could test is whether individual empowerment and good governance are mutually reinforcing. Effective justice systems, the secure rule of law, open channels of participation and the protection of civil liberties may both empower citizens and work better if empowered citizens hold them to account. Through open information flow, increased transparency, active civil society and improved spending on social services, good governance lays the ground for effective public action and empowerment, especially of marginalized communities. Once empowered, these communities may promote good governance and reduce state capture through their effective civic co-operation, voice and inclusion.<sup>71</sup> Further work is needed on the direction of causality and on what facets of empowerment appear to matter for good governance at the community and higher territorial levels.

#### 4.4 Disempowerment, the Inability to Take Action

The *Voices of the Poor* study argued that hopelessness and powerlessness of the poor are reflected in various areas of their lives, such as exploitation in the market, limited bargaining power, the inability to stand up to corrupt government officials, a lack of political accountability towards their elected representatives, limited access to basic social services, and poverty traps such as the vicious circle of indebtedness.<sup>72</sup> One implication is that impoverishment affects people's confidence to make choices. They may not be able to identify any valuable course of action, or they may be risk averse, as they "feel defenseless against damaging loss".<sup>73</sup> Some evidence suggests that, correspondingly, empowerment may transform perceptions of well-being. Alsop *et al.* (2006) reported that about 70% of the (female) participants of an empowerment programme in Ethiopia reported increased involvement in household decision-making—and that a majority reported feeling less lonely and isolated, and happier. The fourth hypothesis we could address concerns links between empowerment and psychological/subjective well-being; we might expect empowerment to exert a positive effect on psychological states and perceived well-being.

#### 4.5 Empowerment and Pro-poor Growth

A number of studies emphasize the need for macro- and meso-level studies on empowerment, as the focus has mainly been on local and small-scale projects (Oxaal & Baden, 1997, p. 24). "Macro-level studies are especially weak on measuring agency and often do not employ a relevant conceptual framework... The lack of empirical research at

'meso' levels presents an important gap, as does the relative lack of rigorous research on policy and programmatic efforts" (Malhotra *et al.*, 2002, p. 35).

Preliminary work suggests that empowerment may be instrumentally important for pro-poor growth and to increase the sustainability of collective activities and the cost-effectiveness of various development interventions.<sup>74</sup> Knack & Keefer (1997) emphasize the close link between empowerment and growth. Encouraging poor communities to participate in poverty reduction not only increases the sustainability of these poverty reduction efforts, they argue, but also promotes pro-poor growth and a more equitable income distribution. Empowerment is argued to have a positive impact on income distribution through the provision of access to basic services, the broadening of human capabilities and the improved distribution of assets. These capabilities and assets are essential for poor people to seize new economic opportunities, thus rendering growth more participatory, inclusive and bottom-up. This pro-poor growth in turn empowers the poor further by promoting their social inclusion, encouraging their collective action and enhancing government accountability towards them.<sup>75</sup>

This section has provided some examples of potential instrumental connections between empowerment and other facets of well-being that could be investigated further using the indicators proposed here, often in conjunction with qualitative data and with data collected at different administrative/territorial levels. It shows that such data would make a valuable contribution to the further understanding of empowerment and its contribution to poverty reduction and human development.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to articulate the reasoning behind the proposed shortlist and draw attention to the potential research questions that the resulting data could begin to address, and the expected strengths and weaknesses of such data. It should be restated that the purpose of this article is to improve and deepen internationally comparable measures of agency and empowerment. Further debate of the concepts, indicators and questions is welcomed.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Notes, Eapen, Mirdul and Sabina Alkire with Sunita Sukendra and Jyothi Nair. 2006. "Women's Definitions of Freedom and Empowerment in Kerala: Results of Focus Groups in Thiruvananthapuram and Thrissur" *Paper presented in 'Individual Agency and Empowerment: A New Measure?'* Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum with the Global Equity Initiative, Harvard University. 22–23 April 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Sen (1999b, p. 152).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

<sup>4</sup> Narayan *et al.* (2000b).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> Narayan *et al.*, *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> Alkire (2005, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Narayan (2005, p. 3).

<sup>10</sup> Malhotra *et al.* (2002, p. 17).

<sup>11</sup> Alsop *et al.* (2006); Narayan (2005).

<sup>12</sup> Malhotra (2003, p. 3).

- <sup>13</sup> Sen (1985b, p. 206). For other descriptions of agency, see: Drèze & Sen (1989, 2002); Sen (1982, 1985a, 1987, 1988a, b, 1989, 1992, 1993a, 1994, 1999a, c, 2002, 2005).
- <sup>14</sup> Sen (1992, p. 51).
- <sup>15</sup> Sen (2002, p. 585).
- <sup>16</sup> Sen (1999b, p. 19).
- <sup>17</sup> Drèze & Sen (1989), for a fuller description see Alkire 2007.
- <sup>18</sup> Malhotra (2003).
- <sup>19</sup> Kabeer (1999, p. 438), cited in Mosedale (2003, p. 16).
- <sup>20</sup> Alkire (2005, p. 226).
- <sup>21</sup> Oakley (2001, p. 13); Bartlett (2004, p. 8); see Uphoff (2005) for a detailed discussion of the concept of power and its relation to empowerment. See also Oakley (2001, 59ff) for an extensive review of previous attempts to define empowerment.
- <sup>22</sup> Mason & Smith (2003, p. 1).
- <sup>23</sup> Uphoff (2003, p. 6, 2005, pp. 224–225).
- <sup>24</sup> Oakley (2001, p. 15).
- <sup>25</sup> Rowlands (1997, p. 13).
- <sup>26</sup> Of course having the assumption is only conceptually sufficient, in that it signals an issue to be addressed; further discussion is required in order to consider operational implications of this. For a criticism of Sen's treatment see Stewart (2005).
- <sup>27</sup> World Bank (2001, p. 39).
- <sup>28</sup> Narayan (2002, p. vi); Narayan (2005, p. 5).
- <sup>29</sup> Narayan (2002, pp. vi–vii).
- <sup>30</sup> Narayan (2005, pp. 5–6).
- <sup>31</sup> Alsop *et al.* (2006, p. 10).
- <sup>32</sup> Narayan (2005, pp. 5–6).
- <sup>33</sup> Petesch *et al.* (2005, pp. 45–49).
- <sup>34</sup> Smulovitz & Walton (2003, p. 2).
- <sup>35</sup> Alsop *et al.* (2006, p. 11).
- <sup>36</sup> Khwaja (2005, pp. 273–274).
- <sup>37</sup> Bennett (2002), cited in Bartlett (2004, p. 54).
- <sup>38</sup> Chambers (2003), cited in Bartlett (2004, p. 54).
- <sup>39</sup> Friedmann (1992, p. 33).
- <sup>40</sup> Mayoux (2000a, p. 2, 2000b); Mosedale (2003, p. 3), cited in Oxaal & Baden (1997, p. 2); Oxfam (1995).
- <sup>41</sup> Malhotra *et al.* (2002); Mayoux (2000a); Oxaal & Baden (1997).
- <sup>42</sup> Oakley (2001, p. 43); Oxaal & Baden (1997, p. 14).
- <sup>43</sup> One could refer to the measures of what the respondent values as *subjective*; however, we believe that the term “*positionally objective*” better conveys the intelligibility of the responses (Sen, 1993b).
- <sup>44</sup> Malhotra *et al.* (2002, pp. 19–20). They mention the example of “the use of contraceptives” that can be an empowering indicator; however, once they are widely used, it becomes obsolete.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17; Bartlett (2004, p. 12); Oxaal & Baden (1997, p. 23).
- <sup>46</sup> Malhotra *et al.* (2002, p. 10).
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18; Khwaja (2005).
- <sup>48</sup> Khwaja (2003, p. 5); Malhotra (2003, p. 3); Oxaal & Baden (1997, p. 6).
- <sup>49</sup> Malhotra *et al.* (2002, p. 12) suggest household, community, regional, national and global as levels of analysis; Bartlett (2004, p. 21) proposes the assessment of empowerment at the village, sub-district and national levels; Holland & Brook (2004, p. 2) argue that empowerment can be measured: at the national, intermediary and local levels; Narayan (2005, p. 18) suggests individual, household, group, community, local, national and global levels.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- <sup>51</sup> Smulovitz & Walton (2003, p. 37). These three types of information are similar to the three levels of choice that Alsop *et al.*, (2006) also identified.
- <sup>52</sup> Khwaja (2005, p. 279).
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279; Smulovitz & Walton (2003).
- <sup>54</sup> Holland & Brook (2004, p. 1).
- <sup>55</sup> Mayoux (2000a, p. 11); Malena (2003, p. 4).

- <sup>56</sup> Malhotra *et al.* (2002).
- <sup>57</sup> Alsop *et al.* (2006, p. 21).
- <sup>58</sup> Narayan *et al.* (2000b, p. 219).
- <sup>59</sup> For further indicators on empowerment in the social domain, see Alsop & Heinsohn (2005) and Alsop *et al.*, (2006).
- <sup>60</sup> The weights for the combined index can be set arbitrarily; alternatively they can be set using statistical procedures such as multidimensional scaling. We have tried to explore these issues in Chiappero-Martinetti & Alkire, Mimeo. A promising technique is to use multidimensional scaling techniques to explore the weights in different contexts (thus verifying comparability or proposing changes in the weights), but not to set the weights statistically for different data sets as comparability would be compromised.
- <sup>61</sup> Alkire (2005, 2007 (forthcoming)).
- <sup>62</sup> Chirkov *et al.* (2003, p. 98).
- <sup>63</sup> Sen (1993b).
- <sup>64</sup> Alkire <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~acgei/PDFs/Capabilities/Intro%20to%20the%20study.pdf>.
- <sup>65</sup> Alkire <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~acgei/PDFs/Capabilities/Intro%20to%20the%20study.pdf>.
- <sup>66</sup> Narayan (2005, p. 7).
- <sup>67</sup> Alsop *et al.* (2006, p. 121).
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144–150.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165–170.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 186–191.
- <sup>71</sup> Narayan (2002, pp. 1–3).
- <sup>72</sup> Narayan *et al.* (2000b, pp. 32–35).
- <sup>73</sup> Narayan *et al.*, *ibid.*, p. 36.
- <sup>74</sup> World Bank (2001); Narayan *et al.* (2002).
- <sup>75</sup> Narayan (2002, pp. 4–6).

## References

- Albertyn, R. (2001) How to Approach and Design a Measuring Exercise. Paper given at Working Seminar on Methods for Measuring Women's Empowerment in a Southern African Context.
- Alkire, S. (2005) Subjective quantitative studies of human agency, *Social Indicators Research*, 74, pp. 217–260.
- Alkire, S., Chirkov, V. & Silva Leander, S. (2006) Indicating Agency. Paper presented in the 2006 International HDCA Conference 'Freedom and Justice', Groningen, the Netherlands, 29 Aug–1 September.
- Alkire, S. (2007) Measuring freedoms alongside well-being, in: I. Gough & J. A. McGregor (Eds) *Well-being in Developing Countries: New Approaches and research Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Alsop, R., Bertelsen, M. & Holland, J. (2006) *Empowerment in Practice From Analysis to Implementation* (Washington, DC: World Bank).
- Alsop, R. & Heinsohn, N. (2005) *Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators*, Policy Research Working Paper (World Bank).
- Appleyard, S. (2002) 'A Rights-based Approach to Development: What the policy documents of the UN, development cooperation and NGO agencies say'. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Asia Pacific, Background Paper for Human Rights Roundtable No.1: "A rights-based approach to development".
- Bartlett, A. (2004) *Entry Points for Empowerment* (CARE Bangladesh).
- Bennett, L. (2002) *Using Empowerment and Social Inclusion for Pro-Poor Growth: A Theory for Social Change*, Background Paper for the Social Development Sector Strategy Paper, World Bank.
- Chambers, R. (1993) *Challenging the Professions: Frontiers for Rural Development* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications), .
- Chattopadhyay, R. & Duflo, E. (2001) *Women's Leadership and Policy Decisions: Evidence From a Nationwide Randomized Experiment in India*, Working Papers Series (Boston: The Institute for Economic Development, Boston University).
- Chiappero-Martinetti, E. & Sabina, A. (2006) Towards a Multidimensional Measure of Human Agency. Paper presented at Queen Elizabeth House Departmental Research Seminar, University of Oxford, May.

- Chirkov, V., Ryan, R., Kim, Y. & Kaplan, U. (2003) Differentiating autonomy from individualism and independence: a self-determination theory perspective on internalization of cultural orientations and well-being, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, pp. 97–110.
- Chirkov, V., Ryan, R. M. & Willness, C. (2005) Cultural context and psychological needs in Canada and Brazil: testing a self-determination approach to the internalization of cultural practices, identity, and well-being, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 36, pp. 423–443.
- Chirkov, V. I. & Ryan, R. M. (2001) Parent and teacher autonomy-support in Russian and US adolescents: common effects on well-being and academic motivation, *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*, 32, pp. 618–635.
- CIDA (1997) *The Why and How of Gender-Sensitive Indicators: A Project Level Handbook* (Hull, Quebec: Canadian International Development Agency).
- Craig, G. & Mayo, M. (Eds) (1995) Community Participation and Empowerment: the Human Face of Structural Adjustment or Tools for Democratic Transformation, in: *Community Empowerment: A Reader*, (London: Zed Books).
- Deci, E. L. & Ryan, R. M. (1985) *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-determination in Human Behavior* (New York: Plenum).
- Downie, M., Koestner, R., Elgeledi, S. & Cree, K. (2004) The impact of cultural internalization and integration on well being among tricultural individuals, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, pp. 304–314.
- Drèze, J. & Sen, A. K. (1989) *Hunger and Public Action*, WIDER Studies in Developmental Economics (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. xviii, 373.
- Drèze, J. & Sen, A. K. (2002) *India, Development and Participation*, 2nd edn (New Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press), xxviii, pp. 373.
- Frankenberg, E. & Thomas, D. (2001) *Measuring Power* (Washington: International Food Policy Research Institute).
- Friedmann, J. (1992) *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Grasmuck, S. & Espinal, R. (2000) Market success or female autonomy? Income, ideology, and empowerment among microentrepreneurs in the Dominican Republic, *Gender and Society*, 14, pp. 231–255.
- Grootaert, C. (2003) Assessing Empowerment in the Eca Region. Paper given at Workshop on Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives, Washington, DC, 4–5 February.
- Grootaert, C. (2005) Assessing Empowerment at the National Level in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, in: D. Narayan (Ed.) *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Washington, DC: World Bank).
- Grouzet, F. M., Kasser, T., Ahuvia, A., Dols, J. M., Kim, Y., Lau, S., Ryan, R. M., Saunders, S., Schmuck, P. & Sheldon, K. M. (2005) The structure of goals across 15 cultures, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89, pp. 800–816.
- Hashemi, S. M., Schuler, S. R. & Riley, A. P. (1996) Rural credit programs and women's empowerment in Bangladesh, *World Development*, 24, pp. 635–653.
- Hindin, M. J. (2000) Women's power and anthropometric status in Zimbabwe, *Social Science and Medicine*, 51, pp. 1517–1528.
- Holland, J. & Brook, S. (2004) Measuring empowerment: country indicators, in: R. Alsop (Ed.) *Power, Rights, and Poverty: Concepts and Connections* (Washington, DC: The World Bank).
- Jackson, C. (1996) Rescuing Gender from the Poverty Trap, *World Development*, 24(3), pp. 489–504.
- Jejeebhoy, S. J. (1995) *Women's Education, Autonomy, and Reproductive Behaviour: Experience from Four Developing Countries*, *International Studies in Demography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Jejeebhoy, S. J. (2000) Women's autonomy in rural India: Its dimensions, determinants, and the influence of context, in: H. Presser & G. Sen (Eds) *Women's Empowerment and Demographic Processes: Moving Beyond Cairo* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Kabeer, N. (1997) Women, wages and intra-household power relations in urban Bangladesh, *Development and Change*, 28, pp. 261–302.
- Kabeer, N. (1999) Resources, agency, achievement: reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment, *Development and Change*, 30, pp. 435–464.
- Kabeer, N. (2001) Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment—theory and practice, *Discussing Women's Empowerment—Theory and Practice*, Stockholm: Novum Grafiska AB.
- Khwaja, A. (2003) A note on “measuring empowerment”—an economist's perspective, *Workshop on Measuring Empowerment: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives* (Washington, DC, 4–5 February).

- Khwaja, A. I. (2005) Measuring empowerment at the community level: an economist's perspective, in: D. Narayan (Ed.) *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives*, pp. 267–284 (Washington, DC: The World Bank).
- Kishor, S. (2000) Empowerment of women in Egypt and links to the survival and health of their infants, in: H. Presser & G. Sen (Eds) *Women's Empowerment and Demographic Processes: Moving Beyond Cairo* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Knack, S. & Keefer, P. (1997) Does social capital have an economic payoff? A cross-country investigation, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 112, pp. 1251–1288.
- Lokshin, M. & Ravallion, M. (2005) Self-Rated Power and Welfare in Russia, in: D. Narayan (Ed.) *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Washington, DC: The World Bank).
- Malena, C. (2003) Measuring empowerment at the national level: the case of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI), *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives*, Washington, DC, 4–5 February.
- Malhotra, A. (2003) Conceptualizing and measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development, *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives*, Washington, DC, 4–5 February.
- Malhotra, A. & Mather, M. (1997) Do schooling and work empower women in developing countries? Gender and domestic decisions in Sri Lanka, *Sociological Forum*, 12, pp. 599–630.
- Malhotra, A. & Schuler, S. R. (2005) Women's empowerment as a variable in international development, in: D. Narayan (Ed.) *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives*, pp. 219–246 (Washington, DC: The World Bank).
- Malhotra, A., Schuler, S. R. & Boender, C. (2002) *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development* (Washington, DC: The World Bank).
- Mason, K. (1998) Wives' economic decision-making power in the family: five Asian countries, in: K. O. Mason (Ed.) *The Changing Family in Comparative Perspective: Asia and the United States*, pp. 105–133 (Honolulu: East–West Centre).
- Mason, K. & Smith, H. L. (2000) Husbands' versus wives fertility goals and use of contraception: The influence of gender context in five Asian countries, *Demography*, 37, pp. 299–311.
- Mason, K. O. & Smith, H. (2003) *Women's Empowerment and Social Context: Results from Five Asian Countries* (Washington, DC: Gender and Development Group, World Bank).
- Mayoux, L. (2000a) *From Access to Empowerment: Gender Issues in Micro-Finance*, NGO Women's Caucus Position Paper for CSD-8 (CSD).
- Mayoux, L. (2000b) *Poverty Elimination and the Empowerment of Women*, Target Strategy Paper (London: DFID).
- McMillan, B., Florin, P., Stevenson, J., Kerman, B. & Mitchell, R. (1995) Empowerment Praxis in Community Coalitions, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5) pp. 699–728.
- Mosedale, S. (2003) Towards a framework for assessing empowerment, *New Directions in Impact Assessment for Development: Methods and Practice*, Manchester, 24–25 November.
- Moser, C. (1991) *Gender Planning and Development* (London: Routledge).
- Narayan, D. (2002) *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction* (Washington, DC: World Bank).
- Narayan, D. (2005) *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives* (Washington: The World Bank).
- Narayan, D., Chambers, R., Shah, M. K. & Patesch, P. (2000a) *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change*, World Bank Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Narayan, D., Patel, R., Schafft, K., Rademacher, A. & Koch-Schulte, S. (2000b) *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?*, World Bank Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Oakley, P. (2001) *Evaluating Empowerment: Reviewing the Concept and Practice* (Oxford: INTRAC).
- Oxaal, Z. & Baden, S. (1997) *Gender and Empowerment: Definitions, Approaches and Implications for Policy No. 40* (Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency).
- Oxfam (1995) *The Oxfam Handbook of Relief and Development* (Oxford: Oxfam).
- Parveen, S. & Leonhäuser, I. (2004) Empowerment of rural women in Bangladesh: A household level analysis, *Conference on Rural Poverty Reduction through Research for Development and Transformation* (Berlin: Deutscher Tropentag).
- Patesch, P., Smulovitz, C. & Walton, M. (2005) Evaluating empowerment: A framework with cases from Latin America, *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives*, pp. 219–246 (Washington, DC: The World Bank).
- Rijavec, M., Brdar, I. & Miljkovic, D. (2006) Extrinsic vs. intrinsic life goals, psychological needs, and life satisfaction, in: A. D. Fave (Ed.) *Dimensions of Well-being. Research and Intervention*, pp. 91–104 (Milano: Franco Angeli).

- Rowlands, J. (1997) *Questioning Empowerment* (Oxford: Oxfam).
- Roy, T. K. & Niranjana, S. (2004) Indicators of women's empowerment in India, *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, September pp. 23–28.
- Ryan, R. M. & Deci, E. L. (2001) On happiness and human potentials: a review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, pp. 141–166.
- Ryan, R. M. & Deci, E. L. (2000) Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being, *American Psychologist*, 55, pp. 68–78.
- Ryan, R. M., Deci, E. L. & Grolnick, W. S. (1995) Autonomy, relatedness, and the self: their relation to development and psychopathology, in: D. Cicchetti & D. J. Cohen (Eds) *Developmental Psychopathology: Vol. 1. Theory and Methods*, pp. 618–655 (New York: Wiley).
- Schmuck, P., Kasser, T. & Ryan, R. M. (2000) The relationship of well-being to intrinsic and extrinsic goals in Germany and the US, *Social Indicators Research*, 50, pp. 225–241.
- Schuler, S. & Hashemi, S. (1994) Credit programs, women's empowerment and contraceptive use in rural Bangladesh, *Studies in Family Planning*, 25, pp. 65–76.
- Schuler, S. R., Hashemi, S. M. & Rileyand, A. P. (1997) The influence of changing roles and status in Bangladesh's fertility transition: Evidence from a study of credit programs and contraceptive use, *World Development*, 25, pp. 563–575.
- Sen, A. K. (1982) Rights and agency, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 11, No. 1, pp. 3–39.
- Sen, A. K. (1985a) *Commodities and Capabilities*, Professor Dr P. Hennipman, Lectures in Economics (Amsterdam, New York: North-Holland; Elsevier Science), pp. 130.
- Sen, A. K. (1985b) Well-being, agency and freedom: the Dewey Lectures 1984, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 82, pp. 169–221.
- Sen, A. K. (1987) The standard of living, in: G. Hawthorn (Ed.), pp. 1–38 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Sen, A. K. (1988a) The concept of development, in: H. Chenery & T. N. Srinivasan (Eds), pp. 9–26 (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science).
- Sen, A. K. (1988b) Freedom of choice: concept and content, *European Economic Review*, 32, p. 269.
- Sen, A. K. (1989) Development as capability expansion, *Journal of Development Planning*, 19, pp. 41–58.
- Sen, A. K. (1992) *Inequality Re-examined* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Sen, A. K. (1993a) Capability and well-being, in: M. Nussbaum & A. Sen (Eds), pp. 30–53 (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Sen, A. K. (1993b) Positional objectivity, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 22, pp. 126–145.
- Sen, A. K. (1994) Liberty and poverty: political rights and economics, *Current*, 362, p. 22.
- Sen, A. K. (1999a) Democracy as a universal value, *Journal of Democracy*, 10, p. 3.
- Sen, A. K. (1999b) *Development as Freedom*, 1st edn (New York: Knopf Press).
- Sen, A. K. (1999c) Economics and the value of freedom, *Civilization*, 6, p. 83.
- Sen, A. K. (2002) *Rationality and Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press), ix, pp. 736.
- Sen, A. K. (2005) *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity*, (London: New York, Allen Lane), xx, pp. 409.
- Sheldon, K. M., Elliot, A. J., Kim, Y. & Kasser, T. (2001) What's satisfying about satisfying events? Comparing ten candidate psychological needs, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, pp. 325–339.
- Sheldon, K. M., Elliot, A. J., Ryan, R. M., Chirkov, V., Kim, Y., Wu, C., Demir, M. & Sun, Z. (2004) Self-concordance and subjective well-being in four cultures, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 35, pp. 209–223.
- Smulovitz, C. & Walton, M. (2003) Evaluating empowerment, *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives*, Washington, DC, 4–5 February.
- Stewart, F. (2005) Groups and capabilities, *Journal of Human Development*, 6, pp. 185–204.
- Strandburg, N. (2001) Conceptualising Empowerment as a Transformative Strategy for Poverty Eradication and the Implications for Measuring Progress. Paper given at UN-DAW Expert Group Meeting, New Delhi.
- Thomas, D. (1990) Intrahousehold resource allocation: an inferential approach, *Journal of Human Resources*, 25, pp. 635–664.
- Thomas, D. (1997) Incomes, expenditures, and health outcomes: evidence on intrahousehold resource allocation, in: L. Haddad, J. Hoddinott & H. Alderman (Eds) *Intrahousehold Resource Allocation in Developing Countries: Models, Methods, and Policy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press).



- Uphoff, N. (2003) Social analytical issues in measuring empowerment for the poor, with concern for community and local governance, *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives*, Washington, DC, 4–5 February.
- Uphoff, N. (2005) Analytical issues in measuring empowerment at the community and local levels, in: D. Narayan (Ed.) *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives*, pp. 219–246 (Washington, DC: The World Bank).
- Van Eyken, W. (1991) *The Concept and Process of Empowerment* (The Hague: Bernard Van Leer Foundation).
- Vansteenkiste, M., Zhou, M., Lens, W. & Soenens, B. (2005) Experiences of autonomy and control among Chinese learners: Vitalizing or immobilizing?, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96, pp. 755–764.
- World Bank (2001) *World Development Report 2001: Attacking Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press).

Copyright of Oxford Development Studies is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.