ABSTRACT

Protection, Empowerment and Equality: ESCAP supports the building of a socially inclusive society for all in Asia and the Pacific, including women, youth, persons with disabilities and older persons. Building on its strength as the most comprehensive regional intergovernmental forum in Asia-Pacific and its unique convening authority, ESCAP promotes change at the policy and institutional levels, working to support governments in the formulation and implementation of social development policies and programmes. To provide a sound basis for governments’ policy decisions, ESCAP conducts applied research on social policy options, strategies and programmes. It promotes regional cooperation and assists countries in reaching consensus to accelerate the implementation of internationally agreed commitments to promote the social integration of vulnerable groups and gender equality. This paper highlights the various ingredients for Social Transformation in a structured manner for empowerment.

KEYWORDS

Women, Empowerment, ESCAP, Equality, Protection, Diversity, Disparity, Social Empowerment, Social Transformation, Service Oriented Mentorship.
INTRODUCTION

Promoting empowerment of people will be at the core when the Commission for Social Development convenes for its 51st session. “Empowering individuals and social groups requires a comprehensive set of policies and institutions. From education and health care to economic and social policy, activities that seek to empower people are expected to increase opportunities and improve people’s quality of life”, said Ms. Larysa Belskaya, Vice-Chair of the Commission’s Bureau.

Asia-Pacific is a region of great diversity and disparity, presenting a contrasting picture in terms of progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals — a set of eight time-bound and measurable goals to reduce poverty and advance overall development.

Despite dynamic economic growth, which has helped lift millions of people out of poverty, the region still accounts for over 950 million people living on less than $1.25 a day. In the coming decades, emerging challenges may further strain the fabric of societies and erode social cohesion, from rising socio-economic disparities within and between countries, to rapid population ageing, youth unemployment, increasing migration and the impact of climate change.

Against this backdrop, ESCAP works towards supporting member States to shape a more inclusive society that protects, empowers and ensures equality for all social groups. Particular focus is given to the needs of women, youth, and persons with disabilities, older persons and people living with HIV. Guided by internationally agreed commitments as well as regional mandates, ESCAP helps countries in the region to better prepare for emerging population and social challenges and tackle persistent ones.

DEFINITION

The concept of ‘empowerment’ has become integral to development thought. Though it has often been associated primarily with gender equality, advances in global development will require a re-examination of the concept and its application to many aspects of human life. The following reflections on the goals, protagonists, and prerequisites for empowerment seek to assist the Commission for Social Development in its consideration of this important issue.

A Conception of Social Empowerment

The term empowerment means many things to many people. Concepts of choice, freedom, agency, capacity, participation, autonomy, and increased resources, however, are common to virtually all definitions. Consensus can therefore be found around the idea of empowerment as a means of improving quality of life and expanding the basis
of human well-being. In short, empowerment can serve as a mechanism for effecting deep and broad-based social transformation.

The process of social transformation can be explored at both the personal and structural levels. At one end of the spectrum, social change is seen as an outcome of the development of individuals, achieved through education, training, access to material resources, and the like. According to this view, structural change is assumed to be an automatic result of personal change. Unfortunately, this rarely bears out in practice, as even those who benefit from such resources find themselves participating in oppressive social structures. At the other end of the spectrum, the human being is viewed entirely as a product of society, and change is considered impossible unless social structures—mainly those related to political power—are changed first. Yet, too often, this approach has supported the idea that ends justify the means and has resulted in conditions of injustice and oppression.

Increasing the capacity of individuals and communities to build more just and equitable social structures requires a conception of social development that avoids these extremes. Individual and structural transformations are intimately related: the individual’s inner life shapes his or her social environment, and that environment, in turn, exerts a profound influence on one’s spiritual and psychological well-being.

The metaphor of the body politic, likening all of humanity to a single social organism, provides a useful framework for exploring empowerment as means to pursue the transformation of individuals and society. Implicit in such a conception are characteristics such as the interdependence of the parts and the whole, the indispensability of collaboration, reciprocity and mutual aid, the need to differentiate but also harmonize roles, the need for institutional arrangements that enable rather than oppress, and the existence of a collective purpose above that of any constituent element. Viewed in this way, empowerment both depends on and contributes to a system in which diverse actors are provided the resources needed for each to make a unique contribution to the whole.

Drawing on the above ideas, individual and collective empowerment can be conceived as the expansion of vision, capacity, and volition necessary for people to act as effective agents of human well-being and prosperity.

**The Protagonists of Social Transformation:**

Who are the primary actors in the processes of social transformation? Experience suggests that three are critically important: the individual, the institutions of society, and the community. In this light, empowerment can be said to involve assisting individuals to manifest constructive capacities in creative and disciplined ways, institutions to exercise authority in a manner that leads to the progress and upliftment of
all, and communities to provide an environment in which culture is enriched and individual wills and capacities combine in collective action.

Raising capacity among these protagonists will require a thorough reexamination of assumptions about human nature. Notions of “us” and “them” deserve particular attention. Discourse in development circles, for example, is often rooted in notions of the “empowered” members of society assisting the “disadvantaged” or “marginalized.” The impulse to rectify social inequalities is unquestionably noble, but us/them dichotomies only perpetuate and reinforce existing divisions. Careful thought needs to be given to ways in which empowerment can be approached as a universal and shared enterprise and not something the “haves” bestow on the “have-nots.”

Closely related is the question of who is empowered and who is not. Historical processes have created inequalities that must be addressed. But the development framework should be one in which every individual and group is presumed to have room for advancement. In this light, the marginalized are not without capacity, and the privileged are not all-powerful. All have capacity to develop and all have a responsibility to advance the welfare of the whole.

Finally, though empowerment denotes someone or something being invested with power, the social dynamics of power seem to have been largely ignored in discussions on development at the United Nations. That an examination of the dynamics of power has proven difficult to integrate into these discussions suggests the need for new and alternative approaches. How can power be conceptualized as something other than a zero-sum commodity? How can its associations with control and domination be replaced by ones of capacity and ability? How can it be approached as an integral part of all social relationships and institutions, rather than a resource to be acquired or lost? Exploration along these lines, we believe, will provide much insight into the means and ends of empowerment.

Prerequisites for Social Transformation

Because those without a seat at the table have little voice in decisions affecting their lives, participation in the systems and structures of society is an essential prerequisite for social transformation. To be anything more than window-dressing though, participation must be substantive and creative. It is not enough for people to be mere beneficiaries of projects, even if they have a voice in certain decisions. They must be far more involved in decision-making processes: identifying problems, devising solutions and approaches, enjoying benefits, and determining criteria for evaluation.

Participation, however, cannot be equated with empowerment—taking part in flawed systems merely perpetuates existing patterns of injustice. In order to advance the common good, individuals must possess both the capacity to assess the strengths and
weaknesses of existing social structures and the freedom to choose between participating in those structures, working to reform them, or endeavoring to build new ones.

Building the capacity of the world’s peoples and social institutions to create a prosperous and just society will require a vast increase in access to knowledge. This will entail approaches that facilitate the generation, application, and diffusion of knowledge at the local level. Rather than unquestioningly adopting “solutions” developed elsewhere, an emphasis on strengthening local capacity to generate, apply, and diffuse knowledge can help to put into place an ongoing process of action and reflection, one which encourages respect of the existing knowledge base of a community, raises the community’s confidence in its ability to devise, implement and assess solutions, and helps to systematize and expand local knowledge. The result is a systematic and coherent process of learning that can gradually encompass a wider range of community endeavors.

Finally, the ability to identify the root causes of injustice will be crucial to the empowerment of populations to become agents of social transformation. Regardless of the advantages a population might enjoy, if it is unable to discern the drivers of social injustice and inequity, it will remain unable to rectify them. If empowerment is to lead to social transformation, it must involve the ability to recognize the forces shaping one’s social reality, to identify the possibilities and challenges presented by that reality, and to devise initiatives for the betterment of society.

Mission Statement

The Next Generation of Service (NGS) connects young people to social change organizations by offering vocational mentorship and promoting community and international service as a component of any career path. It is our mission to empower young people to chart professional lives that work toward the betterment of humanity.

Provide Service-Oriented Mentorship

Represent a new approach to career counseling by focusing on the individual, their passions, their unique strengths, and the specific social injustices that stir them. We do this by:

- Educating students on existing service opportunities (i.e. AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, Idealist, Jewish partnership programs, Catholic partnership programs, etc).
- Counseling and supporting young people through difficult choices, existing fears, and challenges to undertaking service, such as family pressure.
Providing practical information and advice on commencing service, such as living on a stipend, deferring student loan payments, etc.

Fostering a community of like-minded and supportive individuals for students who otherwise feel alone, or like everyone else “has it all figured out”.

Create New Service Opportunities

Alongside educating students about existing service opportunities, NGS will work with non-profits to carve out and create new long-term or stipend-supported volunteer options. This will be done through:

- Forming partnerships with companies that offer part-time positions and benefits.
- Identifying community members willing to house a volunteer.
- Eliciting donations to specifically support living stipends.

Advocate and Promote Service

As part of being a movement that inspires individuals to incorporate service into any career path, NGS will inform diverse communities about the opportunities for service, and the widespread benefits that it holds. This will be done in such ways as:

- Sharing stories of people who have participated in service via social media, a blog, and podcasts.
- Keeping people informed about trends within different social change movements, and how to get involved through a variety of outreach methods.
- Advocating local politicians and government bodies to support more service-oriented funding, student loan deferment options, and other policies that greater facilitate service opportunities.

Growing the Demand for an E-Marketplace

Ultimately, providers will join e-marketplaces when they see that there is demand for them to do so. Yet our interviewees felt that in many ways lack of demand for the e-marketplace was the greatest challenge.

While councils have responded to this challenge in different ways, it is clear that in all cases, proactive offline activity is required to grow sufficient demand to sustain an e-marketplace. Different groups of users will require different strategies to encourage them to use the e-marketplace. Those who receive personal budgets and direct payments could be supported and encouraged to use the e-marketplace at the point of assessment, when local authorities will spend time with the person to plan their care support. For personal budget holders without direct payments, the payment
functionality of the marketplace will need to be compatible with a managed personal budget. As a consequence of the Care Act 2014, local authorities are now also more likely to come into contact with self-funders, as they have been given a right to information and guidance if they have care needs; this presents another opportunity to stimulate demand for the site. Though personal budget holders have thus far been the most-targeted group with regards to e-marketplaces, they represent a dwindling proportion of all people with care needs.

In line with both the Care Act and the broader preventative agenda, e-marketplaces should be for everyone – regardless of how their care is funded or how severe their care needs are judged to be. By targeting their e-marketplaces beyond the users the council currently comes into contact with, local authorities can more effectively use the sites to support preventative care and maintain a sustainable level of demand. As well as making sure that care users know about the e-marketplace, local authorities must embrace the government’s ‘digital by default’ strategy if they are to grow demand. This means making digital services so good that they become people’s first choice. In practice, this requires designing services for an easy customer journey, including using intuitive and accessible language rather than the professional or corporate language typically used by councils. This is particularly important for social care users who may be less used to using the internet. Design should be built into the service from the outset – otherwise, potential users will turn away from the e-marketplace.

**Reaching People Who Lack Digital Access or Skills**

A key concern for local authorities is that rates of digital exclusion are high among the groups that e-marketplaces are targeted at. Many people with care needs do not have access to the internet, and/or lack the digital skills or confidence to effectively use a transactional website. Age, disability and learning difficulties are reliable predictors of whether a person is likely to have access to the internet and the skills to use it (LITRG 2012). Even those users who do have internet access may be able to carry out some tasks online but not others. For example, Hertfordshire county council have found that while some elderly users are comfortable researching services and products online, possibly with assistance from a career, they prefer to actually make the transaction by phone because it is a communication channel that they trust.

While digital exclusion does currently present a limit to how extensively e-marketplaces can be used, our interviewees offered a number of reasons to be optimistic about the future in this regard, as well as a number of actions that can be taken now. Perhaps most obviously, given the increasing extent to which the internet and digital services permeate our lives, we can expect future generations of people accessing care services to be much more confident about organizing care online. The latest statistics on internet usage in the UK show that 61 per cent of people over the age of 75 have never used the internet, but this falls sharply to 24 per cent among the 65–74
age groups (ONS 2014). Indeed, Iain MacBeath, director of health and community services at Hertfordshire county council, told us he predicts that the service users of tomorrow will demand to be able to arrange their care digitally, as more and more of what we do is arranged online.

This argument is true not only of tomorrow’s elderly but of other groups – including those with learning disabilities, who increasingly are able to access the internet in controlled and assisted ways. The proportion of disabled people who had never used the internet fell from 33 per cent to 30 per cent between 2013 and 2014 alone.

In this context, it is clear that even if not all service users are currently ‘digitally included’, we should build public services for those who are and who will be in the future, while at the same time pursuing proactive digital inclusion strategies and ensuring that multiple channels are available through which people can organize their care, to make sure that no-one falls through the gaps. Teams with responsibility for e-marketplaces should work closely with those working on digital inclusion to realize mutual gains: helping digitally excluded people to use an e-marketplace could be a good means of improving their digital literacy.

Shop4support has found that assisting personal budget holders to use a marketplace on a trial basis – perhaps for one aspect of their support package – can lead to them becoming full adopters (shop4support 2010). Furthermore, in many cases younger and more digitally literate careers will be able to support service users’ use of the internet and e-marketplaces.

Finally, digital services must be designed for usability by the target group; otherwise they will continue to use the channel that they find easiest. Social care tends to perform badly in terms of usability. In the 2014 iteration of its annual survey of local authority websites, SOCITM found that only 33 per cent of councils met its standard for how easy it was made to ‘find out about care homes for an elderly relative’, and nearly 40 per cent of visitors looking for social care information on council websites did not find what they were looking for (Socitm 2015: 11).

To improve upon these numbers, users should be involved in the design and testing of services. Dominic Campbell of Future Gov told us that he sees digital exclusion as a fluid concept, and argued that ‘we digitally exclude people by the way we do digital. We make it unusable’.

New government digital services such use iterative testing to make sure that their services can be used easily by their target groups. Similarly, Future Gov’s Casserole Club18integrates its app service with texting to make sure that older people can access the service using a channel that works for them. Although most councils pay lip service to the principle of user-based design, many of the sites we came across were not
intuitive and included potentially confusing categorizations based on divisions of responsibilities within councils. For example, some sites have separate categories for ‘information and advice’, ‘search and shop’, ‘directory’ and ‘accessing support’, which have the potential to be confusing.

**Opportunities for Civil Society to Contribute**

The Commission plans to organize its work in three main forums: the general debate, panel discussions and side events. There will also be many opportunities for civil society to contribute.

A Civil Society Forum will be convened on 5 February under the theme “Civil society: Promoting empowerment of people to achieve the goals of social development” as it relates to the priority theme of the Commission, as well as to the discussions associated with the preparation of the post-2015 development framework.

Held a day prior to the opening of the Commission, the Forum has set a tradition of bringing together prominent civil society actors, representatives of Member States and officials of the United Nations to reflect on a key issue relevant to the work of the current session. It will present its conclusions to the Commission at its opening session. In addition, more than 30 side-events, covering a range of relevant topics in regard to social development, will be organized during the Commission.

During this session, the Secretariat will make a room available to NGOs for briefings and other events.

**Social Groups in Focus**

In addition to the empowerment theme, this session will “provide an opportunity to exchange views on other important key issues, such as disabled persons, youth, ageing, family and others”, Ms. Adhikari said, referring to the provisional agenda which will feature discussions on several different plans related to various social groups. The Commission also plans to review several reports of the Secretary-General on each of these issues as well as on emerging matters.

This is a very good opportunity for the Commission to highlight and visualize not only the need for vulnerable groups to be empowered, but to contribute directly to the ongoing discussion that the General Assembly, ECOSOC and other relevant bodies of the UN are going to have with regards to the upcoming 2015 agenda for development,” said H.E. Mr. Carlos García González, Vice-Chair of the Bureau.

The work of the Commission can be followed on the website of DSPD, where visitors can find links to all the documentation produced ahead and during the meeting.
Statements made by delegates will also be made available online as the meeting takes place.

With the arrival shortly of government representatives and civil society to UN Headquarters in New York, the stage is set for the important work of the Commission to begin. A vital platform for shaping future policies, it will help promote people’s empowerment across the globe.

The importance of empowerment for development has also been underscored by DESA’s Under-Secretary-General Mr. Wu Hongbo. As experts met last September to prepare for the Commission, he stated, “Empowerment is critical to poverty eradication and to development. Indeed, I would even say that any long-term solution to poverty must start with empowerment.”

**Getting the Data Right for Global Development**

Statistics play a vital role as the world community works to enhance development across the globe. Health, the economy, the environment and the Millennium Development Goals; these are just a few of many areas measured and analyzed. On 26 February, the UN Statistical Commission will convene to assess how this work can be further improved to meet new and emerging challenges.

“We are again looking forward to strong participation from Member States. As in past years, we expect about 140 countries to be represented by their experts from the capital, making the Statistical Commission a truly global forum on official statistics,” said Sabine Warschburger, Statistician in DESA’s Statistics Division, who has been coordinating the preparations for the Commission and its many side events for a number of years.

Established as a functional Commission under the UN Economic and Social Council in 1947, the UN Statistical Commission is the highest decision-making body for international statistical activities, especially when it comes to setting statistical standards, the development of concepts and methods and their implementation at the national and international levels. It also oversees the work of DESA’s Statistics Division.

As the World Statistics Day was celebrated a few years back, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon underscored the important role of the Commission, saying that it “has created international methodological standards and guidelines in virtually every area of statistics. It has played a key role in helping governments strengthen their statistical reporting, making data more available and comparable across countries and regions than ever before.”

**Big Data and More**
“In 2012, the Commission session was supplemented by a record number of 60 side events. It’s my understanding that this makes the Statistical Commission one of the largest and busiest events held at UN Headquarters,” said Sabine Warschburger, also explaining that a similar number of side events is expected this year.

One of the events is “Big Data for Policy, Development and Official Statistics”, arranged on 22 February and taking a closer look at the fundamental change to the nature of data caused by the arrival of the Internet, mobile devices and other technologies. In addition to delegates from National Statistical Offices, participants will include representatives from Google, Amazon Web Services, SAS, UN Global Pulse and OECD.

Other side events through learning centers and lunchtime seminars will focus on the newly revised Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics, the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework and Trade and Business Registers and will take place on 25, 26 and 27 February.

The vast range of topics and the many side events being arranged, bear testament to the crucial role statistics play for nations worldwide. The Secretary-General has previously also stated, “Statistics are a vital tool for economic and social development, including our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. For development to succeed, we need data collection and statistical analysis of poverty levels, access to education and the incidence of disease. Statistics are a central consideration in justifying almost every aspect of budgets and programmers that enable hungry children to be fed or that provide shelter and emergency health care for victims of natural disasters.”

CONCLUSION

The socio-economic empowerment of women is also reflected in the development program me of the country. In this part of the report, an attempt has been made to analyze the socio-economic profile of beneficiaries of SHGs of Amravati district.

There is an emerging need to improve women status which should start with economic empowerment. Empowerment is a concept that is of equal importance to both men and women. It is idea of sharing power, of truly giving it way. Empowerment is the process through which individual gain efficiency, defined as the degree to which an individual perceives that they control their environment. The empowerment of women involves four interrelated and mutually reinforcing components:

- Collective awareness and capacity building and skill development,
- Participation and greater control,
- Decision making power and
➢ Action to bring about gender equality.

In the present study most of beneficiaries are female (95.5%) belonging SHGs as compared to male (4.5%). Study reveals Self Help Groups touched upon lives of particularly poor women lived in rural areas. The number of SHGs linked to banks in Amravati district is 20033 as on September 2011 of which 90 percent were exclusively women groups.

New issues have to be addressed to effect social and economical progress of our nation. The most important one is women's empowerment through self help groups. SHGs have undoubtedly begun to make a significant contribution in poverty alleviation and empowerment of poor, especially women in rural areas of our country. Women's contributions are vital and their empowerment would hasten the pace of social development. Investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to achieve their choices and opportunities is the definite way to contribute to the economic growth and the overall development. The empowerment of rural women leads to benefit not only to individual women and women groups, but also to the families and the community as a whole.

Women empowerment is the major goal of development in India Empowering poor rural women through micro credit has been well recognized and micro finance schemes for empowering poor women launched by Government and NGO. Most of the members says that, woman empowerment is nothing but to achieve social and economic development of India and also recognizing one's rights and responsibility.

However at taluk level (183) respondents said overall development of woman is considered as woman empowerment. SHG's an Effective Tool of Micro-credit for Financially Disadvantaged Group Self Help Groups of women, which are homogeneous small economically affinity group of poor people, and who voluntarily come together to save small amount of savings, called thrift regularly and extend microloan among themselves to meet their emergent needs. They are come together for the purpose of solving their common problem through self help and mutual help who do not have access to formal financial institutions.

The meetings held monthly. These group members save small amount of money they used to take loan from the group itself as per needs. The rate of interest is not too high. The SHG maintain their account in banks, which is operated jointly. Small loan and small savings are very helpful for the poor, even to have their own job. These members are able to maintain their attendance register, minute book, account book and pass book.
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