

Deepa Narayan (ed.). *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*. Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2005. Pages xx+475. Paperback. Price not given.

‘Empowerment’ has different meanings in different sociocultural and political contexts, and does not translate easily into all languages. Choosing indicators for measuring empowerment, therefore, depends on the social, economic, political, and cultural environment of the target population, and this multi-dimensional nature of empowerment complicates issues of measurement. This book brings forth the different indicators of empowerment in a cross-disciplinary perspective, underlining the challenge of evaluating empowerment and its contribution to development effectiveness and outcome.

Section 1 of the volume focuses on the conceptual framework, key concepts, and methodological issues in measuring empowerment. Deepa Narayan presents an analytical framework for empowerment and discusses key challenges in the effort to measure empowerment in the overview chapter. Patti Petesch, Catalina Snulovitz, and Michael Walton, in the second chapter, present the conceptual framework which contains four building-blocks under “opportunity structure” and “agency of the poor”. All four components influence one another, and together they have effects on the development outcome. The authors argue that empowerment of poor people on a large scale requires both top-down changes in institutions and organisational processes and bottom-up changes in poor people’s organisations and networks and in their individual assets.

Section 2 focuses on the gender and household issues. Anju Malhotra and Sidney Ruth-Schuler focus on measuring empowerment as a variable in international development. They review 45 empirical studies and conclude that most of the studies are focused on the micro level, with some attempts at the macro level, while the middle (or meso) level is missing. The authors focus on three methodological issues: the multi-dimensionality, aggregation levels, and context-specificity of the indicators. Later on, Karen Mason discusses the definition, the determinants of women’s empowerment in the domestic sphere, and the best way to measure and analyse the effectiveness of interventions to empower poor women in developing countries. Joy Deshmukh-Ranadive explores the concept of “space” as a tool for measurement of both power and empowerment, focusing on the hierarchical positions of men and women within domestic units. Spaces can be economic, physical, sociocultural, political, cultural, or mental. The framework suggests a step towards the measurement and ultimate enhancement of empowerment for women.

Section 3 further highlights the importance of subjective well-being as an aspect of empowerment and discusses methods for measuring psychological aspects. Diener and Biswas-Diener describe two psychological concepts: subjective well-being and psychological empowerment. The authors argue that external conditions

are necessary but not sufficient for empowerment; psychological feelings of competence, energy, and the desire to act are also required. However, Graham and Pettinato conclude that relative income differences matter more to happiness than the absolute ones; that the respondents' positions on the income-ladder matter; that change in status, measured by income mobility, has strong effects; and that age and education have effects independently of other variables. Lokshin and Ravallion present empirical evidence on the relationships among subjective well-being, subjective power, and household incomes. The study comes up with the finding that higher individual and household incomes raise both perceived power and welfare, and challenge somewhat the case for the independent importance of empowerment. Steven Brown presents the Q-methodology for measuring empowerment. Brown illustrates the use of the methodology with reference to interventions in schools for farmers in Peru, dairy herd improvement in Uruguay, and health care in Serbia.

Section 4 focuses on community and local governance levels, highlighting analytical issues, role of peace and conflict, economist's perspective, and mixing qualitative and econometric methods in measuring empowerment. Uphoff and Moser discuss conceptual issues of power, community structures, organisation, solidarity, and peace. In his study, Uphoff distinguishes six types of power based on the kinds of resources (economic, social, political, informational, moral, and physical) that influence the probability of achieving desired results. However, crime, violence, fear, and insecurity all affect assets, capabilities, and institutions at the individual, household, and community levels. Thus, Moser highlights peace as an integral and vital component for empowerment and development effectiveness, and that participation in such efforts by individuals, organisations, and communities can contribute to their empowerment. Khwaja, Rao, and Woolcock focus more specifically on methodological issues in measuring empowerment at the community and local levels. They argue that in order to develop an empowerment framework for development that can be implemented, it is necessary first to distinguish between aspects of empowerment that are considered of direct value, that is, as ends in themselves, and those that are means to an end. Rao and Woolcock examine the strengths and weaknesses of the quantitative and qualitative methods in assessing the impact of development programmes and policies on poor people's empowerment. They argue for a mixed-methods approach to overcome the disadvantages that each approach (i.e., qualitative and quantitative) offers when used in isolation.

Finally, Section 5 focuses on policies and structures at the national level. Grootaert identifies conceptual dimensions that facilitate empowerment and suggests indicators at the national level. These include measures of government effectiveness, corruption, illicit payments, rule of law, regulatory quality, voice and accountability, women in political office, social capital, decentralisation, and income inequality. Malena and Heinrich explore the concept of empowerment and civil society, clarifying the links between them. The authors describe a unique three-year

participatory process to develop the Civil Society Index (CSI) to measure empowerment at the national level in a way that allows international comparison. The index measures four dimensions: the structural characteristics of the civil society; the external environment within which the civil society exists and functions; the values held and advocated; and the impact of activities pursued by the civil society actors, in particular with regard to governance and development. Knack identifies two types of economic and political reforms that benefit the poor as well as other groups, namely, improving the security of property rights and changing the nature of political participation by citizens to focus on the public interest rather than the individual benefit.

Varshney, reviewing the relationship between democracy and poverty, concludes that democracies in poor countries have neither attacked poverty as successfully as some dictatorships in the past five decades nor failed as monstrosly as many authoritarian countries have. The debate offers two responses: first, policy-makers feel compelled to adopt the politically popular direct methods rather than the less popular indirect methods that may be more effective in producing inclusive economic growth; second, the power of numbers of the poor gets diffused across ethnic groups, since it is easier to mobilise poor people along ethnic lines than as an economic class. Diamond thinks democracies have not been more successful in reducing poverty because such democratic practices are not, in fact, fully implemented in many nominally democratic countries. He identifies three dimensions for characterising democracies: free and fair elections, civil liberties, and responsible and accountable governance. Munck discusses the challenge of creating good measures for concepts that are essentially political, including both empowerment and democracy. He explores four aspects of the development of indicators and the related measures of democracy: the definition of concepts, the identification of indicators to measure the concepts, the construction of scales to measure variations, and the aggregation rules for developing indexes that combine several measures. Munck concludes by cautioning against “overcomplicating” the concepts being measured.

There is a growing body of literature on how to evaluate the role and importance of empowerment in poverty reduction and development. What is new in this book is the attempt to measure empowerment in a systematic way. One of the major difficulties in measuring empowerment is that the behaviours and attributes that signify empowerment in one context often have a different result elsewhere. On the other hand, it is not always clear whether researchers who use terms such as “women’s empowerment”, “gender equality”, “female autonomy”, or “women’s status” are referring to similar or different concepts. Some non-governmental organisations, private sector bodies, and public departments talk about “gender issues” underlining women’s concerns only, which is a conceptual oversight. Gender refers to both male and female, and thus it must be clarified in practical use.

This publication is an invaluable resource for planners, practitioners, educators—all students learning about the latest research approaches to measuring empowerment. The challenge of measuring, monitoring, and evaluating empowerment taken up in this book is worth pursuing because of its central importance in poverty reduction.

Faheem Jehangir Khan

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics,
Islamabad.