



Determinants of Empowerment in a Capability-Based Poverty Approach: Evidence from The Gambia

SOFIA KARINA TROMMLEROVÁ^a, STEPHAN KLASSEN^b and ORTRUD LEßMANN^{c,*}

^a Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland

^b University of Göttingen, Germany

^c Helmut-Schmidt-Universität, Hamburg, Germany

Summary. — Although empowerment is intrinsically important and instrumentally valuable to escape poverty, there is little research on its empirical drivers. Using household-level information and advanced econometric techniques that also address endogeneity issues, we examine what empowers individuals in The Gambia to change their own lives and to affect changes in their communities. We find that age, gender, marital status, nationality, economic activity, and health are important determinants of empowerment at both communal and individual levels. Self-reported capabilities and communal empowerment strongly affect respondents' desire to change things in their lives. Lastly, we find that men, foreigners, people in good health, and younger people report higher individual empowerment.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Key words — empowerment, agency, capability approach, The Gambia, correction for endogeneity

1. INTRODUCTION

Well-being and poverty are nowadays mostly considered multidimensional concepts that cannot be assessed merely in monetary terms. Sen's Capability Approach goes even further by emphasizing the importance of agency in promoting human development. Increasing agency means enhancing people's freedoms to act and to achieve what they consider valuable, i.e. having the freedom to act in line with one's own values and to pursue one's goals. Empowerment is a concept closely related to agency. We define empowerment as an increase in agency which enables individuals to pursue valuable and important goals.

Both agency and empowerment are intrinsically valuable and can be instrumentally effective in promoting human development and reducing poverty (Alkire, 2009). Thus, understanding the empirical drivers of empowerment can guide policy to enhance it. In fact, there have been a number of theoretical and empirical studies that focus on *women's* empowerment or empowerment of the *poor* and found positive well-being outcomes of increases in agency (e.g., Allendorf, 2007a; Hindin, 2000; Kim *et al.*, 2007; Thomas, 1997). In contrast, there is very little literature that considers empowerment outside of this gender context, which is the focus of our study. Furthermore, previous studies often employed suboptimal measures of agency and empowerment. In the last few years, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) has developed an improved set of desirable agency and empowerment measures that aim at capturing various aspects of empowerment. Whereas some of these aspects have already been analyzed empirically, others are still to be investigated. The most widely researched empowerment measures are those focusing on household decision-making (e.g., Hindin, 2000; Jejeebhoy, 2000; Malhotra & Mather, 1997) and to a certain extent those capturing domain-specific autonomy (e.g., Chirkov, Ryanand, & Willness 2005).¹

This article presents an empirical analysis of those aspects of empowerment which have been largely neglected so far,

namely power to affect change in one's own life and to influence change in the community. The analysis is based on a unique dataset from The Gambia which contains information on capabilities and on empowerment indicators as had been proposed by OPHI. The main goal is to identify determinants of empowerment, with a particular focus on determinants of individuals' self-reported ability to induce changes in their lives at communal and individual levels. Generalized ordered logit and multinomial logit models are employed in search for correlates of this type of empowerment and tested for potential sample selection and endogeneity biases.

Our results show that individuals' ability to induce changes in communal life in The Gambia is causally related to education, national origin, age, gender and marital status, economic activity, and health. Concerning the ability to change things in one's own life (which we call "individual" empowerment), we first show that people's self-reported capabilities are much more important correlates of individuals' desire to change something in their lives than their socio-demographic characteristics or economic situation. We also show that respondents' confidence that *they* will be the most powerful agents in their lives is significantly higher for men, foreigners, severely disabled people, people free of health limitations, and younger people. Furthermore, higher age and some health limitations cause Gambians to rely more often on their families or the government for support. Gender, marital status, national origin, literacy, economic activity, and household wealth are also determinants of reliance on others (family or government).

We argue that the results matter for several reasons. First, it is pioneering exploratory work in using new direct measures of

* The authors would like to thank Jean-Louis Arcand for including their questions to the CDDP survey he was in charge of in The Gambia and Eric Djimeu for conducting the survey and for helpful comments. We would also like to thank Bumi Camara as well as participants at the AEL conference in Passau 2004 and the 2014 EADI conference in Bonn, as well as three anonymous referees for helpful comments and discussion. Final revision accepted: July 13, 2014.

communal (and hence also political) as well as individual agency and empowerment. Second, the pool of possible determinants of empowerment analyzed comprises not only objectively observable socio-demographic and economic characteristics of respondents but also a unique set of self-reported capabilities. Third, this work is of great relevance in considering empowerment more broadly, moving beyond the existing literature on women's empowerment which mostly focuses on intrahousehold relations. Fourth, advanced econometric techniques are applied to correct for endogeneity and sample selection problems in order to identify causal effects. Finally, given the importance of empowerment as a development goal in its own right, understanding the drivers of empowerment can help inform policy about how to promote it. The next section is concerned with definition and measurement of empowerment as an agency-related concept. It also formulates our hypotheses regarding the determinants of empowerment. Section 3 describes the data. Section 4 presents the empirical evidence on empowerment at both communal and individual levels. Section 5 concludes and identifies areas for potential future research.

2. MEASUREMENT OF EMPOWERMENT AND HYPOTHESES

Empowerment has gained importance in the development economics literature especially since the landmark Voices of the Poor (Narayan, 2000) study and the World Development Report 2000/2001 (World Bank, 2001). Dozens of theoretical and empirical studies have refined the concept since then; most of them focus on women's empowerment or on empowerment of the poor.

Unfortunately, empowerment still lacks a single clear definition. Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) alone list 29 distinct definitions. Their main common feature is that they define empowerment as a process (e.g., Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005) in which a marginalized or relatively powerless group improves its position. The proposed definitions differ mostly in the domain or dimension of improvement brought about by empowerment. In this study, following largely Alkire (2005) and Ibrahim and Alkire (2007), empowerment is understood as an increased possibility to gain agency.²

Agency is one of the integral parts of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. Sen (1985) defines agency freedom as "what the person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important." (p. 203). Thus, we see empowerment as a gain in agency, enabling the individual to pursue valuable and important goals. Agency, seen in Sen's definition, is both intrinsically valuable and instrumentally effective in promoting human development and reducing poverty (Alkire, 2009).

(a) Conceptualization and indicators

When framing empowerment as an increase in human agency, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) draw on the concept of

four types of power developed by Rowlands (1997): power *over* ("controlling power"), power *to* ("generative or productive power"), power *with* (collective power of a group), and power *from within* (strength based on self-acceptance). Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) think of each type of power as a distinct exercise of agency, namely in terms of control, choice, communal belonging, and change, see Table 1. The latter two, which will be the focus of this article, represent the ability to change aspects in one's life at communal and individual levels, respectively.

Measures of empowerment as conceptualized here face, however, considerable methodological challenges related to the locale of empowerment, the comparability of empowerment across contexts, and the difficulty of measuring this elusive concept with quantitative methods (Narayan, 2005).

Despite these difficulties, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) propose a set of internationally comparable direct measures of agency and empowerment. The main criteria for empowerment indicators to be included in Ibrahim and Alkire's (2007) final set are: coverage of subject areas particularly relevant to the life of the poor, international comparability, coverage of both instrumental and intrinsic aspects of empowerment, possibility to identify changes in agency over time, and positive experience with the particular indicators in previous surveys. Regarding the first and second type of empowerment in Table 1, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) list a number of empirical studies that were undertaken based on the proposed indicators. However, there seem to be no empirical studies focusing on the third and fourth types of empowerment. To fill this gap, we focus on empowerment in the community and empowerment as change in one's own life. The indicators proposed by Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) are adopted here with minor alterations.

The empowerment in the community is captured by the following question:

Q: Do you feel that people like yourself can generally change things in their community if they want to?

A: Yes, very easily / Yes, fairly easily / Yes, but with a little difficulty / Yes, but with a great deal of difficulty / No, not at all

Despite being measured at individual level, the question aims at capturing "the ability of people to change things collectively in their community" (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007, p. 29, accentuations by the authors), i.e., their power *with* other community members. The formulation "people like yourself" intends to depart at least partly from the individual empowerment and to encompass, to a certain degree, collective empowerment.

The empowerment as change in one's own life is measured by two questions:³

Q1: Would you like to change anything in your life at this point in time?

A1: Yes/No

Q2: Who do you think will contribute most to any change in your own life?

Table 1. Four types of power and empowerment

Type of power	Type of empowerment
Power over	Empowerment as control: control over personal decisions
Power to	Empowerment as choice: domain-specific autonomy, household decision-making
Power with	Empowerment in community: changing aspects in one's life at communal level
Power from within	Empowerment as change: changing aspects in one's life at individual level

Note: Based on Ibrahim and Alkire (2007, p. 388).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7394260>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7394260>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)