Quick guide to power analysis

When applying a human rights-based approach, it is important to analyse power relations in society. Unequal social relations and power imbalances between different social groups (for example between men and women) contribute to poverty and discrimination and hinder the fulfilment of all human rights for all human beings.

Example: A project is developed to promote children’s right to education.

As starting point the following question is asked: “Why do children lack access to education?” The answer might be that parents are not aware of the importance of sending their children to school. As a result, changing the attitudes and behaviour of the parents becomes an important focus of the project. However, by posing the question differently it is possible to get more information about the needs of different groups and perhaps also to draw improved conclusions on what needs to be done. What if the question had been formulated in the following way instead: “Why do girls and boys lack access to education?” The answer might have led to the conclusion that the project needs to challenge traditional values and gender roles in society to make sure that all children have their right to education fulfilled.

The example above illustrates two different ways to start an analysis:

1. Why do children lack access to education?
2. Why do boys and girls lack access to education?

By asking the second question more information on the situation can be attained. This includes information on power, social relations and discrimination.

It is important to consider that if there are power gaps between groups in society, and if these groups are equally strengthened through a development project, the inequalities between them will remain. For example, to reduce gender inequalities it is often not enough to include both women and men in a project, but it might be necessary to address the structures and attitudes that construct the gender roles. Instead of being “equally strengthened” it is important that the men and women are “strengthened to an equal level”.

In order not to overlook the situation, needs and rights of different groups in society when doing a power analysis, it is necessary to shift between different viewpoints. How do different factors such as age, gender, educational level, disability, health and sexual orientation affect the access to power and the social status of people? When different aspects are considered simultaneously the approach used is called an intersectional approach.
Guiding questions for a power analysis

Which groups in society can we identify and include in our power analysis?

- Women and men?
- Girls and boys?
- Young and old?
- Children?
- Elderly?
- Different ethnic groups?
- Groups based on family ties, kinship or clan?
- Rich and poor?
- LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex)-persons?
- People living with hiv and aids?
- People with disabilities?
- …?

In which way is there a difference between the groups identified above when it comes to:

- **power** (formal and informal)
- **possibilities** (resources, access to information, knowledge, contacts/networks etc.)
- fulfillment of **human rights**?

- How many in the target group of our project belong to each group (see above)?

- What access do the groups (e.g. men and women, young and old, different ethnic groups, people with different social status) have to the decision making structures in the community? (e.g. do BOTH men and women have access and possibilities to influence decisions?)

- What access do the groups have to different community assets (e.g. land, employment, loans and saving, education/knowledge, time etc.)?

- Are there any particular challenges/problems related to discrimination and/or repression of certain groups in the community (e.g. human rights violations related to gender such as Female Genital Mutilation, violence against women, lack of inheritance rights, forced marriages or discrimination based on ethnicity, sexual identity, disability etc.)?
What are the root causes to the challenges identified above?

- Discrimination?
- Social norms, behaviour and roles?
- Traditional values?
- Exclusion?
- Legislation?
- Duty-bearers who do not take responsibility or lack capacity?
- Lack of capacity among rights-holders?

How can the root causes be addressed? What can be done to close the power gaps identified?

- Challenge norms?
- Cooperate with actors that have technical expertise?
- Cooperate with key actors who can contribute to change?
- Advocacy work?