

Annex 27: Sustainable Child Centered Community Empowerment

Red een Kind together with its partner organizations intend to function as enablers (see mission statement) or facilitators of especially vulnerable children, adults and communities thus contributing towards the well-being and development of children. Through the process of empowerment of the child, its care givers and the community, an enabling takes place to achieve long term well-being of the children in the community. An important starting point is that children are valued by parents and the entire community through increased awareness and behavioural change.

Empowerment

Central in what Red een Kind wants to do is the empowerment of people including children and other vulnerable groups through the accumulation of assets (both internal as external) or protective factors and by addressing negative factors affecting for well-being and development thus contributing towards their resilience.

What does this empowerment entail? At the core of empowerment is the idea of power. Empowerment requires that power can change and expand. We need to recognize that power exists within the context of a relationship between people or things. Power does not exist in isolation nor is it inherent in individuals. Since power is created in relationships, power and power relationships can change. Therefore empowerment can be seen as a process of change. Power is often seen as something you get at the expense of others. However, contemporary research has opened the perspective of power as something that is shared, that is characterized by collaboration, sharing and mutuality. Empowerment can therefore be said to consist of three key elements: it is a process; it is social as it exists within the context of a relationship and it is multi-dimensional as it occurs within social, psychological economic and other dimensions. Empowerment can be defined as:

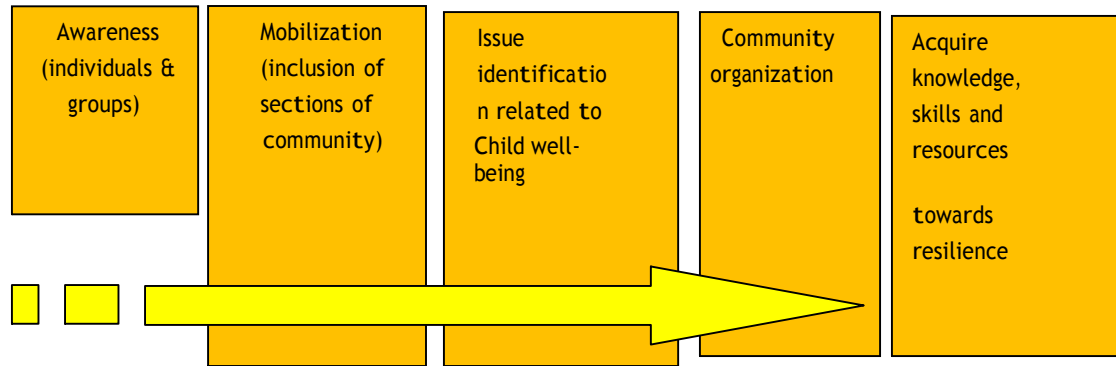
A multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their lives. It is a process that fosters the capacity to implement in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important.

Empowerment happens at various levels such as individual, group and community. As empowerment is a process it is something that develops as we work through it. One important implication of this definition of empowerment is that the individual and community are fundamentally connected. Individual change is a prerequisite for community and social change and empowerment. Individual change can become a bridge to community connectedness and social change. We cannot give people power and we cannot make them “empowered”, we can provide the opportunity, resources and support that they need to become involved themselves.

The empowerment process

When we consider empowerment as a process the following elements can be identified as being part of the process:

Figure 5: The process of from individual to community empowerment



Awareness raising

One of the first steps that needs to take place is growth of awareness, resulting in increased appreciation of vulnerable groups in the community (children and related vulnerable groups) or appreciations of one's own abilities and resources. This will result in increased hope and interest to join hands with others to work towards change.

Mobilization

The process of bringing vulnerable individuals and groups together in the community, to address issues around child well-being, is the process of mobilization. There is a growing sense that something needs to be done and can be done regarding the development of children. It is a process whereby individuals recognize their commonalities and enter into a dialogue and for change with each other.

Issues identification

Through a process of assessments / dialogue the involved people identify issues (related to child well-being and development) that are felt to be common priorities to be addressed. These can be various but will often relate to a thematic area such as education, health, livelihoods and child care or protection.

Community organization

A group of people who live near to each other come together into an organization such as a self-help group or children's club to act on their own interest. Communities are seldom homogenous groups. Community building is the effort to increase involvement and partnership among members of a community to work together to achieve common objectives. Community building can have a more or less human rights based focus.

To allow various sections to be empowered it might be necessary to allow them to organize themselves along the line of common interest and section of society such as children's groups, women's groups, producer groups etc. with a representation at community level.

By building groups that are democratic in governance, open and accessible to community members, and concerned with the general health of the community rather than a specific interest group community members can be empowered, with the end goal of distributing power more equally throughout the community.

Acquisition of knowledge, skills and resources

It is through a process of awareness, mobilization, issue identification and organization that individuals, groups and the community as a whole acquire knowledge, skills and manage to access and acquire resources for development and resilience. The knowledge, skills and acquired resources are life stage specific. These processes can be applied to all kinds of vulnerable groups both adults as well as children.



Participatory Toolbox: This toolbox has been developed to facilitate the empowerment of vulnerable community members. The characteristics of the tools is that they encourage participation, creates awareness and assists people to assess their situation, prepare plans to address issues and monitor the outcome of activities (see participatory toolbox).

Self Help Groups (SHG) approach: Self-help groups are seen as instruments for a variety of goals including empowering women, developing leadership abilities among poor people, increasing school enrolments, and improving nutrition and the use of birth control. Financial inter mediation is generally seen more as an entry point to these other goals, rather than as a primary objective (for more information see SHG manual, Kindernothilfe).

Child led development groups: children that come together to look into issues that are a concern to them. They analyse the issue, learn about it, write stories and where possible take action to contribute towards community development (for more information see child participation workshop materials).

