

# Introduction to Power Analysis

## What is power analysis?

'Power' may be defined as *the ability to create or resist change*. 'Power analysis' is a growing body of frameworks, principles, knowledge and tools for understanding who, in a given context, has what abilities to create or resist change. It can help us answer some fundamental questions such as:

- *What should and can we do to change institutions and power dynamics which keep people in poverty?*
- *What power do beneficiaries and other stakeholders have to create change?*
- *What power do beneficiaries and other stakeholders have to resist change?*
- *What additional power do beneficiaries need to ensure they get their own desired outcome?*
- *How can power be more equitably distributed?*

## Why is power analysis essential for Christian Aid?



Just power relations are at the heart of Christian Aid's corporate strategy *Partnership for Change*. Christian Aid believes poverty is structural: driven by the ways in which power is unevenly distributed. That a lack of power to create *good* change or resist bad change is a form of poverty in its own right. *Partnership for Change* is not about redistributing resources to people who live in poverty; rather we seek to change and to support people to change the power structures and dynamics that keep them poor in the first place. So Christian Aid's overall goal is for all to have 'the power to end poverty'. In order to affect this change, we need first to understand how power is created, sustained or resisted in a given context. This helps us to understand what structures we need to change and how we can do it. The process of doing this is called 'power analysis'.

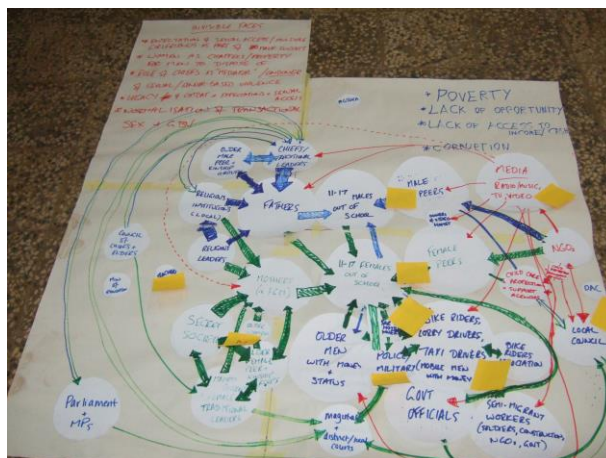
## What are the different ways to analyse power?



**'Power over...'** is the most commonly recognised expression of power, with many negative associations to it such as the use of force and oppression, meetings behind closed doors and hidden actors. It is seen as a 'win or lose' relationship and is expressed in having power over something or someone. When access and influence over vital resources and services is controlled by a few to the exclusion of the majority, their *power over* perpetuates inequality, poverty and injustice.

**Power can sometimes seem monolithic and impenetrable**, sinister and unchanging – especially for people who have lived under regimes which deny or repress their participation in creating change. Such a one-dimensional perspective of power can prevent us even considering working with some actors to create change. The good news is that power is multi-dimensional and dynamic - forever changing according to the actors involved, the context and circumstances. If we want to change power imbalances, we must recognise that power is not fixed and impenetrable, but instead has many shifting dimensions to it. It therefore presents many opportunities to form new partnerships for change. A tool called *Power Mapping* can help us to identify these opportunities.

**‘Power with’ is a more constructive alternative to ‘power over’**. It’s about building alliances and partnerships with those who share our goals through collective action and mutual support. But it’s also about reaching out to those who don’t necessarily share exactly the same goals and bridging gaps between stakeholders by finding common ground, interests and values with a view to reducing conflict and building more just power relations. *Power Mapping* can help us to identify opportunities for collective action with both traditional and non-traditional allies.



Power mapping in Sierra Leone

**Power is often hidden or even invisible:** We are used to trying to influence the more visible structures of power, such as parliaments or government departments. But we are learning that these institutions often lack the power we think they do. The real power often lies not with institutions, but rather with *individuals within institutions*. To effect change, this is the hidden power we need to seek out. Other types of power dynamic – such as gender, caste or class – are so ingrained in daily life that they are accepted as ‘normal’. Yet these and other discriminatory ideologies, give rise to discriminatory social norms, which in turn encourage the development of discriminatory laws and policies – and as a result: poverty and disempowerment. Therefore to tackle the root of poverty, and unjust power dynamics, we need to look beyond the visible structures of power, to the less visible structures and dynamics which keep people in poverty. Frameworks such as the Power Cube<sup>1</sup> can remind us to analyse these less visible aspects of power.

**We need to map the spaces where decisions are made** and ask whether or not they are accountable to those who will be affected by them? Are decisions made by an elite few behind closed doors? Or are there spaces for civil society participation and oversight? If this is not possible, how can we create or claim new decision-making spaces?

**The most overlooked form of power is the ‘power within’ ourselves:** our own sense of self-worth and self-confidence. It is a personal realisation and commitment to living the idea that all people, including ourselves, are created equal, with inherent dignity and worth. It is the power which motivates us and gives us the strength and self-confidence to go and reach out and form partnerships with others to claim our rights and those of others. Power within can also be applied to groups of

<sup>1</sup> [www.powercube.net](http://www.powercube.net)

individuals who share a similar sense of self worth, and mutual trust in a given context. ‘Power within’ and ‘power with’ are mutually reinforcing of each other; partnerships cannot be just or equitable without respecting the inherent dignity of others. Body mapping power is a tool which can help us identify what ‘power within’ those we work with have (or need) to create the changes they want.

**Another framework for analysing power is ‘Power to...’** This is the state of *being empowered* - individuals or groups having the **capacity** to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. The kinds of capacities individual beneficiaries (or groups of similar beneficiaries) need to be fully empowered can be categorised into ‘**knowledge power**’, ‘**positional power**’, ‘**resource power**’ and ‘**personal power**’. Understanding what specific power people have, and what power they need to create change in a given context is vital if we are to understand how best to support them. Body mapping can also help us with this.

**Power operates at every level in the world:** from our own personal ‘power within’ to global power structures such as multinationals corporations and multi-lateral organizations, or global power dynamics such as geopolitics and climate change. In between there may be regional, national, sub-national, community and even household power dynamics and structures. All of these different levels of power structures and dynamics are interrelated. They all affect each other. Understanding how they do can help us understand where change needs to happen at different levels, and how it can be achieved. Power Mapping can be used at any level – from household to global – to help us do this.

### When and with who should we do power analysis?

When	In order to understand...	Possible tools	Done with
<b>Country strategy development</b>	What key national and regional level power structures and dynamics are perpetuating poverty? How can we change them? Is our theory of change correct or not?	<a href="#">Power Mapping</a> – to identify key problems, questions and potential pathways of change	Programme staff and key/select partners
<b>Country Operational Planning</b>	What national or regional level power structures and dynamics are we going to change and how?	<a href="#">Power Mapping/ Power Matrix</a>	Programme staff and partners
<b>Project planning, M&amp;E</b>	What power do beneficiaries have and/or need to create change?	<a href="#">Power Mapping</a> <a href="#">Body Mapping</a>	Partners and beneficiaries
<b>Programme monitoring &amp; learning</b>	Is change happening or not – why and how?	<a href="#">Power mapping/ matrix for learning and review</a>	Programme staff and partners

### How can we learn more about power?

We are still learning about power, its different dimensions and how it works in different contexts. We have much to learn about what works and what doesn’t and this makes learning about power a key priority for Christian Aid.

## Shifts in our understanding of power analysis

Dimension of change	From...	To...
<b>Understanding of power</b>	It is monolithic and impenetrable	It has many different dimensions to it and offers many possibilities for engagement
	Power is sinister and unchanging	It's a dynamic thing, forever changing, forever being negotiated and renegotiated
	You either have it or you don't	We all have it to varying degrees - it all depends upon context
<b>Primary aim of power analysis is...</b>	To understand how to make power structures and dynamics redistribute resources in favour of poor people	To understand how to create institutionalized changes to power structures and dynamics in favour of poor people
<b>Aiming to achieve...</b>	Power 'over' institutions	Power 'with' and 'power within' institutions and individuals
<b>Focus of power analysis</b>	Visible power structures and dynamics	Invisible and hidden power structures and dynamics
<b>Method of power analysis</b>	Occasional and intuitive	Systematic and methodical
<b>Levels of analysis</b>	National/sub national	From individual all the way to global
<b>When is it used?</b>	Programme/project design	Programme/project assessment, design (inc 'theory or change' development), monitoring and evaluation
<b>Who uses it?</b>	Programme staff and partners	Programme staff, partners and communities

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Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives. Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.

UK registered charity number 1105851 Company number 5171525 Scot charity number SC039150 NI registered charity number XR94639  
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