Improving Programme Design with Power Analysis Tools

Practical Application of the Power Cube within Oxfam GB Programme Design in Guatemala

This case study explains how power analysis can help with programme design. It explains how Oxfam GB and partners have used the Power Cube to design a programme that aims to enhance the political and social leadership of young indigenous women in Western Guatemala. The Power Cube is a framework for analysing the levels, spaces and forms of power, and their interrelationship. It is useful in letting us explore various aspects of power and how they interact with each other. For more info you can visit www.powercube.net.

Context in Guatemala

Guatemala is country with a population of 13 million. 42% of the total population is indigenous and 40% is under 14 years of age. It has the largest and most dynamic economy in the Central American region but, at the same time, it has one of the most uneven distributions of wealth in Latin America[i]. Some of the most critical indicators are the highest percentage of malnutrition in Latin America —and the fourth in the world[ii]—, and the social expenditure to GDP ratio, which is the lowest in the Central American region[iii].

Two siblings in a family participating in an Oxfam programme in Guatemala's 'dry corridor'. Credit: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam.

The poverty map is as follows: 73% of indigenous households and 70% of the rural population are poor (UN, 2010). Both in rural and urban areas, the indigenous population, particularly women and youth, are systematically excluded from economic, social and political processes through exclusionary economic policies and deeply rooted attitudes and practices such as racism and sexism in the private and public sectors. Generally women, indigenous people and peasant communities face different forms of exclusion which are related to deep problems of the socio-economic distribution of wealth, an acute lack of recognition of their identity and economic, social and cultural rights. At the same time, these groups are particularly affected by the high levels of violence that affect Guatemalan society at large, especially youth in urban communities.

Oxfam GB's Programme

In Guatemala, Oxfam GB is in the process of redefining its programme priorities for the period 2011-2015. One of our programmes focuses on the empowerment and social and political participation of young, indigenous women who are systematically excluded for reasons of gender and identity.
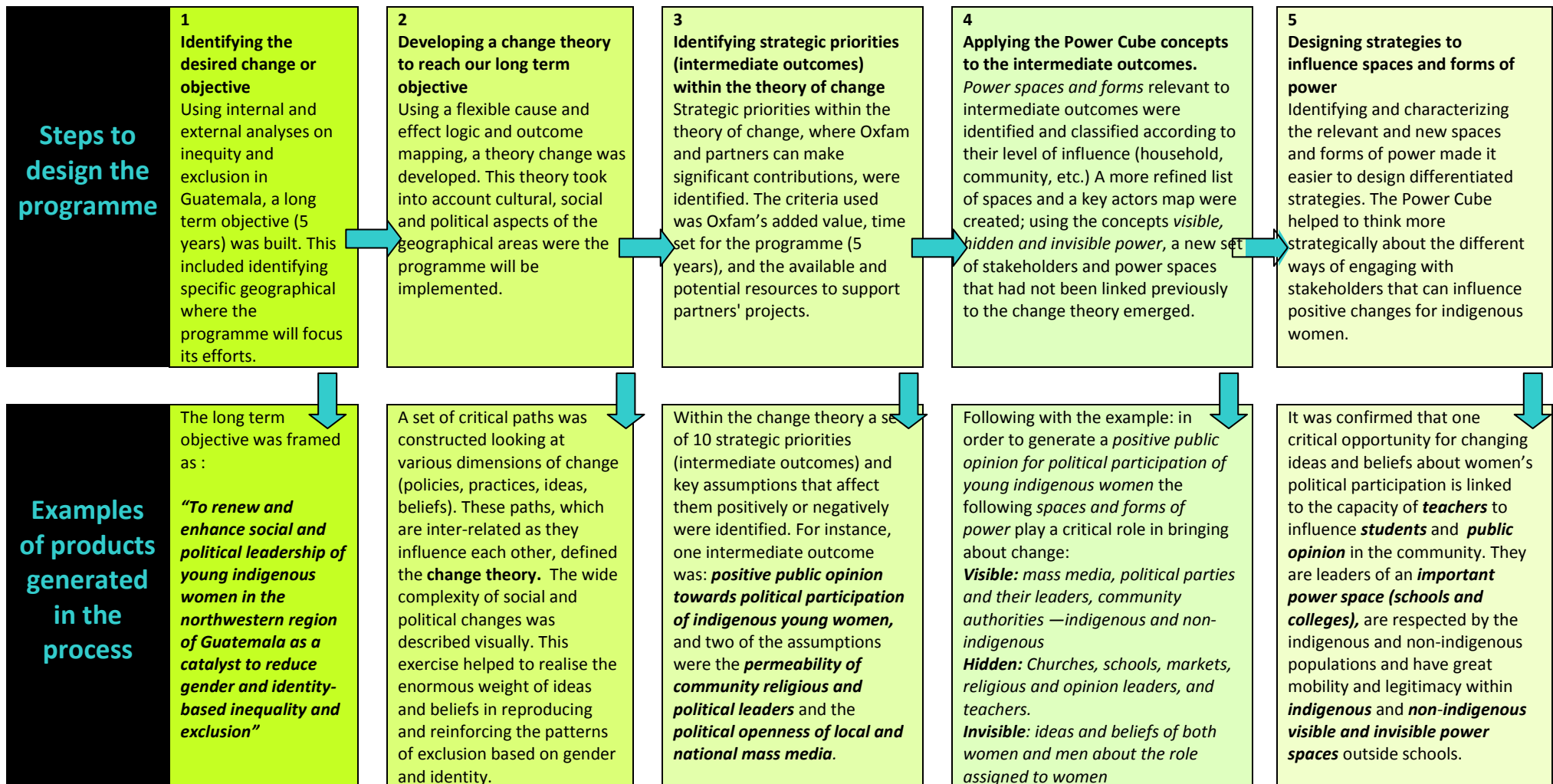
The objective of the programme (2011-2015)is to support the strengthening of participation and political empowerment of young indigenous women and their organizations to influence and contribute to social and political change processes that will reduce gender and identity based exclusion. The programme supports projects aimed at:

1. Building and strengthening the capacity of indigenous women to enhance their social and political leadership, based on their needs and daily practices, strengthening their knowledge and skills to become/reaffirm themselves as political subjects
2. Identifying, recovering, and promoting cultural and indigenous traditional practices that contribute to improving inter-generational and gender equity.
3. Influencing public opinion, indigenous and non-indigenous civil society organizations and social movements to promote and achieve changes in policy and public institutions in order to increase the opportunities for formal political participation and representation of indigenous women.

To respond to this challenge, Oxfam GB in Guatemala has developed a programme design process that includes the Power Cube as a tool to support social, political and economic analysis and to define programme priorities, key stakeholders and programme strategies.

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Methodology applied to programme design

In order to apply the Power Cube within the programme design phase, an introductory workshop was held to share the concepts (forms, spaces and levels) and methodology to apply the Power Cube as a tool for power analysis. As a learning exercise, participants designed a stakeholder map relevant to the programme objective, and characterized them using the methodology and concepts of the Power Cube. The programme design followed a five-step process, and although the Power Cube was used mainly in step four, this was also used at other moments of the design process.

Steps to design the programme	**1** **Identifying the desired change or objective** Using internal and external analyses on inequity and exclusion in Guatemala, a long term objective (5 years) was built. This included identifying specific geographical where the programme will focus its efforts.	**2** **Developing a change theory to reach our long term objective** Using a flexible cause and effect logic and outcome mapping, a theory change was developed. This theory took into account cultural, social and political aspects of the geographical areas were the programme will be implemented.	**3** **Identifying strategic priorities (intermediate outcomes) within the theory of change** Strategic priorities within the theory of change, where Oxfam and partners can make significant contributions, were identified. The criteria used was Oxfam's added value, time set for the programme (5 years), and the available and potential resources to support partners' projects.	**4** **Applying the Power Cube concepts to the intermediate outcomes.** *Power spaces and forms* relevant to intermediate outcomes were identified and classified according to their level of influence (household, community, etc.) A more refined list of spaces and a key actors map were created; using the concepts *visible, hidden and invisible power*, a new set of stakeholders and power spaces that had not been linked previously to the change theory emerged.	**5** **Designing strategies to influence spaces and forms of power** Identifying and characterizing the relevant and new spaces and forms of power made it easier to design differentiated strategies. The Power Cube helped to think more strategically about the different ways of engaging with stakeholders that can influence positive changes for indigenous women.
Examples of products generated in the process	The long term objective was framed as : *"To renew and enhance social and political leadership of young indigenous women in the northwestern region of Guatemala as a catalyst to reduce gender and identity-based inequality and exclusion"*	A set of critical paths was constructed looking at various dimensions of change (policies, practices, ideas, beliefs). These paths, which are inter-related as they influence each other, defined the **change theory.** The wide complexity of social and political changes was described visually. This exercise helped to realise the enormous weight of ideas and beliefs in reproducing and reinforcing the patterns of exclusion based on gender and identity.	Within the change theory a set of 10 strategic priorities (intermediate outcomes) and key assumptions that affect them positively or negatively were identified. For instance, one intermediate outcome was: *positive public opinion towards political participation of indigenous young women,* and two of the assumptions were the *permeability of community religious and political leaders* and the *political openness of local and national mass media*.	Following with the example: in order to generate a *positive public opinion for political participation of young indigenous women* the following *spaces and forms of power* play a critical role in bringing about change: *Visible: mass media, political parties and their leaders, community authorities —indigenous and non-indigenous Hidden: Churches, schools, markets, religious and opinion leaders, and teachers. Invisible: ideas and beliefs of both women and men about the role assigned to women*	It was confirmed that one critical opportunity for changing ideas and beliefs about women's political participation is linked to the capacity of **teachers** to influence **students** and **public opinion** in the community. They are leaders of an **important power space (schools and colleges),** are respected by the indigenous and non-indigenous populations and have great mobility and legitimacy within **indigenous** and **non-indigenous visible and invisible power spaces** outside schools.

The power cube contributes to identifying and characterizing **spaces and forms of exercising power** that other tools, such as the stakeholder map, do not manage to visualize, mainly because the Power Cube requires analysis of invisible and hidden forms of power. This can contribute to *baseline indicators* to track qualitative changes to particular structures or relations over time.

The tool adds significant value to analysis, enabling a better understanding of the underlying relationships between visible power than a stakeholder map on its own, and the invisible and hidden ways in which power (parallel power, ideas and beliefs) operates. Social and political processes are dynamic and a form of power can be both visible in one sense and invisible in another, e.g. local governments democratically elected but co-opted by private agendas and even illegal ones.

Both context and social and political change processes are complex. The application of the tool helps to illustrate the complexity of power relationships (institutional, policies, practices, ideas and beliefs, home, community, sub-national, national). Applying the tool to a project can be less complex than applying it to a programme. During the design of a programme or project, it is important to manage the complexity and consider the real capacities of different stakeholders to approach the issues, and to focus on objectives and realistic targets.

Knowledge and experience of the context to be analysed are fundamental inputs. Since our individual understanding, assumptions, ideas and beliefs about ideas, beliefs, practices, cultural codes, and processes of decision making can be limited, it is very important to bring diverse perspectives into the analysis. Participation of people that interact with the various forms of power is fundamental to ensure rigorous analysis.

Applying the power cube can contribute to different phases of project and programme design. In Guatemala's case, it was applied at three stages: first to develop a stakeholder map relevant to the programme objectives, secondly to support design of a theory of change, and thirdly to analyse power regarding the programme's expected outcomes to refine advocacy, alliance building and partnership strategies. This allowed the shift from wide and general analysis to specific definition of more appropriate strategies.

It is the deliberate questions the Power Cube prompts, rather than the tool itself, that will lead to good analysis. The outcomes of using the Power Cube were useful because the experience and diversity of participants allowed good questions about power, gender and ethnicity to take the analysis to deeper levels mainly around hidden and invisible power.

It is very important to include ourselves (international cooperation) and our partners (e.g. local NGOs) as actors with diverse forms of power (even if held unkowingly), and avoid making the analysis only about "the others".

This document has been elaborated with collaboration by Sara Alvarez, Martha Rosales, Eduardo Caceres, Jo Rowlands and Juan Carlos Arita.

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[i] Guatemala has a social cohesion index of 53.7 in the GINI scale (World Bank, 2006)
[ii] 2006) 43.4 % of children under 6 suffer malnutrition (2010, Paho)
[iii] Guatemala 7.4%, Central American region 11.6%, (2009, Sica)