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Policy Report on Empowerment for the Roma Initiatives Office (RIO)

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This study was commissioned by the Roma Initiatives Office (RIO) . It was conducted and recognized in partial fulfillment for the “Policy Labs” course within the Department of Public Policy at Central European University. Policy Labs are part of the MA curriculum. They give an opportunity for small teams to work for external clients producing and presenting policy relevant research that will be used for advocacy, assessment and development. Clients are civic organizations, donors, research centers and international organizations. The Policy Lab focusing on this project was mentored by Andrea Krizsan, Research Fellow, Central European University’s Center for Policy Studies.

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Policy Research Reports are occasional studies that provide support or background information for wider research projects. They include reviews of scientific literature, state of the art reports, and country studies. They are works in progress and offer practical combinations of academic and policy writing.

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ABSTRACT

This policy paper begins with an overview of broad concepts of empowerment as well as how donors and practitioners operationalize this complex concept “on the ground.” From here, four dimensions of empowerment (political, educational, legal and economic) are explored in greater depth; more nuanced definitions and concrete examples of empowerment-targeting programs are given for each. Finally, lessons are drawn for how RIO may integrate extant empowerment concepts, program types or indicators into its own work empowering Roma women.

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Introduction: Concepts of Empowerment

Empowerment is a broadly used concept, however, the general understanding and usage of this term is often problematic. It is very popular mainly in development practice as well as in psychology, education, economics, and leadership studies. As it can be connected to many different contexts and areas, it can be present in various forms. Hence, as Rappoport argues¹, it is easier to define empowerment by its absence than by its presence. As a result, the term empowerment is often used carelessly and uncritically. This problematic understanding of the concept of empowerment might, in the end risk becoming degraded and valueless².

In order to avoid misunderstanding, it is very important to define this concept in a precise and deliberate manner and identify its main characteristics. As McWhirter points out, empowerment is:

„the process by which people, organizations or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and (d) support the empowerment of others in the community.“³

According to Page and Czuba,

„Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, 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.“⁴

Main attributes of empowerment identified in these definitions are „multi-dimensional“ and “process-based“. Firstly, the **multi-dimensional character** of empowerment means that it occurs in various fields and in different dimensions of life such as social, economic, political spheres. Even though these dimensions—to some extent—overlap and are interconnected, each of them has its own specificities. This is the reason why this document deals with

¹ Rappoport (1984) cited in Page, N. and Cheryl E. Czuba. 1999. What is empowerment?. *Journal of extension*, Volume 37, No.5.

² Jo Rowlands.1995. Empowerment Examined. *Development in Practice*, Volume 5, No. 2.

³ McWhirter (1991) cited in Jo Rowlands.1995. Empowerment Examined. *Development in Practice*, Volume 5, No. 2.

⁴ Page, N. and Cheryl E. Czuba. 1999. „What is empowerment?“. *Journal of extension*, Volume 37, No.5.

specific dimensions of empowerment separately and is focused particularly on **political, legal, educational and economic empowerment**.

In addition to various thematic fields, empowerment also occurs at differing level such as that of individual, group, and community⁵. The personal dimension is about “developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalized oppression.”⁶ However, many theorists agree that empowerment must go beyond the process of personal development. Individuals must work together to in order to be successful. Therefore collective empowerment at the level of group and community is necessary. Collective cooperation can be seen within households, communities, organizations, institutions, societies or networks.

According to Rowlands, this notion of collective cooperation entails “involvement in political structures but also collective action based on cooperation rather than competition.” Furthermore, collective action can be focused locally e.g. village level or in a specific institutional network. Considering the dichotomy of individual versus collective empowerment, it is very important to note that one cannot replace another. Even if collective empowerment is in place, empowerment of individuals within community such as that of women or minority group members must be always regarded as an equivalent necessity.

Secondly, “**process**” refers to a “path or journey, one that develops as we work through it”.⁷ Yet the unexpected danger of this “path” can be estimating the duration of this process, as well as in the intangible character of empowerment outcomes such as self-confidence, skills and capacities. As many development agencies are predominantly results-oriented, they might be tempted to work with individuals or communities that already possess some degree of control over their lives in order to achieve empowerment-related results as effectively as possible. As a result, such empowerment-focused programs often fail to address the poorest and most marginalized. The identification of appropriate indicators of change as well as regular evaluation should therefore always be regarded as a highly important part of empowerment-related projects.⁸

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Jo Rowlands.1995. “Empowerment Examined.” *Development in Practice*, Volume 5, No. 2.

⁷ Page, N. and Cheryl E. Czuba. 1999. “What is empowerment?” *Journal of extension*, Volume 37, No.5.

⁸ Jo Rowlands.1995. :Empowerment Examined.” *Development in Practice*, Volume 5, No. 2.

Achieving empowerment is intimately linked to addressing the causes of disempowerment and tackling disadvantage caused by the way in which power relations shape choices, opportunities and well-being. Insights from gender theory into the empowerment debate have increased clarity over the use of the concept of power. Rowland (1997) categorizes four types of power relations to stress the importance between such⁹; a concrete example for women's and/or ethnic minority groups' empowerment is given for each:

- **Power over**, which emphasizes the ability to coerce and influence the actions and thoughts of the less-powerful.

In social and legal terms this means that women would have a greater role in decision-making processes.

- **Power to**, which implies to mobilization and change of existing hierarchies, but also means access to decision-making.

Speaking in economic terms, this would mean the increased access of women to more income and microfinance, at the same time reducing the burden of unpaid work and childcare. It also allows for acquiring of knowledge of legal and political processes for removing the formal barriers of historically disenfranchised groups.

- **Power with**, which is power that stems from collective action and stresses the way in which gaining power actually strengthens the power of others.

An example of "power with" is that of international women's groups collectively challenging discrimination and forming joint actions with NGO coalitions for the purpose of requesting the increase of public welfare provision. This participation in such a movement allows them to further lobby for their interests.

- **Power within**, which is power coming from individual consciousness; it focuses on building self-esteem.

"Power within" might be evidenced in women's desire for equal rights to access resources, and their level of self-esteem, confidence and recognition within their society. Ethnic minorities may harness such power to challenge legal discrimination and political exclusion.

⁹ Cecilia Luttrell and Sitna Quiroz, with Claire Scrutton and Kate Bird, "Understanding and operationalizing empowerment", Overseas Development Institute, Working Paper 308, November 2009, available at www.odi.org.uk

Moreover, these aspects of empowerment are not “flat,” but interlocking and even hierarchical. Longwe suggests that the power to access welfare and other basic needs are prerequisites to “higher” degrees of power such as participation, mobilization and control¹⁰.

Considering all of the critical aspects of empowerment mentioned above, it is essential for outside professionals to consider the way in which such are fostered via empowerment-related projects. The role of funders, supporting institutions and implementing organizations must maintain a facilitative approach, creating *external support* for beneficiaries’ *internal process* of empowerment. Once the process of empowerment becomes directive and imposed by outsiders, it can no longer be considered to be encouraging genuine empowerment but—on the contrary—disempowering the people concerned¹¹.

¹⁰ as cited in Luttrell and Quiroz (ibid)

¹¹ Carothers, T. and D. de Gramont. 2011. "Aiding Governance in Developing Countries. Progress Amid Uncertainties.: *The Carnegie Papers*, November, p. 11.

Operationalizing “Empowerment” in Program Design and Evaluation

So how do governments, NGOs and donors foster empowerment? The very nature of empowerment—intangible, non-linear in its progress and based on a complex, inter-linking system of variables—makes it a particularly challenging concept to both promote and measure. The *process-based* nature of empowerment fundamentally runs contrary to traditional project management, which places strong emphasis on the *products*, or quantifiable outputs, of programs¹². This is especially true in the modern sphere, wherein the rise of evidence-based policymaking in the public sector and an increased pressure to quantify program objectives and outputs can be seen throughout much of the development field, both public and private¹³.

The process of developing, monitoring and evaluating programmatic elements has the potential to enhance programmatic self-reflection, bolster support for programs, and build a body of research for future initiatives. However, there is equal potential for negative consequences. By applying traditional programmatic design and indicators to the sphere of empowerment projects, donors, supporting institutions and project-managing organizations run the risk of unintentionally promoting “empowerment lite”—in which beneficiary organizations are forced to focus their efforts on the most easily-quantified activities¹⁴. Thus, organizations working in the field must strike a balance between the shorter-term nature of the project cycle and the longer-term nature of the empowerment process.

In the following sections, four major dimensions of empowerment, and the ways in which development agencies and organizations have worked to support such will be explored: political empowerment, legal empowerment, educational empowerment and economic empowerment. Legal and political forms of empowerment are examined for their contribution to providing opportunities for access, participation and institutionalization of roles of power for all people. Education, essential to decision-making, access to the labor

¹² Ebrahim, Alnoor (2003). “Accountability In Practice: Mechanisms for NGOs.” *World Development* 31 (5), 813-829

¹³ See, for example, Davies et. al (2000), *What Works? Evidence-based Policy and Practice in Public Services*. The Policy Press. Chapter 1, 2.

¹⁴ Cornwall, Andrea (2012). “Donor policies fail to bring real and sustained change for women.” *The Guardian Poverty Matters Blog*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2012/mar/05/women-route-to-empowerment-not-mapped-out> (accessed 06.03.2012).

market and breaking the cycle of poverty, is targeted within the realm of social empowerment. Finally, economic empowerment receives in-depth attention as a driver of individuals' and families' ability to make their own decisions and as a complementary component to other forms of empowerment.

In each section, programs, outcomes and lessons learned which are particularly relevant to RIO's areas of focus (women and/or Roma populations) are emphasized.

Chapter 1: Political Empowerment

Definition

Political empowerment represents the capacity to analyze, organize and mobilize, which results in the collective action that is needed for collective change. It is often related to a rights-based approach to empowerment and the empowering of citizens to claim their rights and entitlements¹⁵.

EXAMPLES of POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT-TARGETING PROGRAMS

1. Organization: 'Rights for all', Bosnia and Herzegovina

'Rights for All' is a nongovernmental human rights and advocacy organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The organization's main activities are to expose and document human rights violations and abuses thorough detailed analysis and reporting. The core belief of the organization is in achieving deep-rooted and sustainable change from the **power within** members of society. The strategies this organization uses in its project design and implementation is international advocacy and mobilization of public demanding legislative and policy reform at all levels of government in BiH.¹⁶

1.1. Program: Roma Women for Life without Violence

This program, started in 2010, targets, identifies and addresses two separate issues; Roma women's rights within the context of Human Rights and the issue of violence towards Roma women. In order to increase the participation of women in political processes, the issues of domestic violence, education and access to institutions had to be considered. The methodology resulted in concrete set of recommendations used for further lobbying activities of the governmental stakeholders to amend relevant strategies and action plans concerning women rights and particularly Roma women's issues.

¹⁵ Piron and Watkins (2004) as cited in Cecilia Luttrell and Sitna Quiroz, with Claire Scrutton and Kate Bird, "Understanding and operationalizing empowerment", Overseas Development Institute, Working Paper 308, November 2009, available at www.odi.org.uk

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina

Even though BiH signed the Roma Decade goals, the country still lacks a substantive and sustainable response to issues of low participation of women in politics and no participation at all of Roma women. With support of UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, Rights for All (in cooperation with partner organizations) developed the first extensive Report on Domestic Violence against Roma Women in BiH 2010 to address this issue.¹⁷ This was primarily done through extensive field research which gathered information about the state and quality of life of women living in Roma communities that are often described patriarchal and traditional.

The methodology encompassed:

- *The formation of a team of Roma women leaders*

Performed through consultations with various Roma nongovernmental organizations (NGO) in the country and women leaders with previous professional experience in women's rights and community work. This stage resulted in identification of 12 Roma women that directly participated in the field research, report writing and lobbying activities.

- *The set-up of an NGO network*

Envisaged to act as a support mechanism to the work of the Roma women leaders' team during the stage of surveying. The network consisted of 25 leading women's and Roma NGOs that offered practical advice, and contributed to the final set of recommendations.

- *Survey*

A detailed survey aimed to obtain a relevant insight into the degree and causes of domestic violence against women in their respective communities conducted in 9 different Roma communities in BiH.¹⁸ Important to consider here is the establishment of trust based relationship between the Roma women leaders and the female members in Roma communities for the purpose of getting valid responses.

- *Recommendations*

Recommendations included enforcement of existing laws governing domestic violence, but also in the related areas of healthcare and social welfare, including trainings for public servants and Roma women. Such programs should be funded by the BiH government and implemented in Roma communities and in close cooperation with Roma NGOs.

- *Lobbying*

¹⁷ Complete report available at: http://www.rightsforall.ba/eng/womens_rights.htm

¹⁸ Sarajevo, Zenica, Kakanj, Visoko, Vitez, Tuzla, Srebrenica, Kljuc, Prnjavor

Conducted meetings and presentations of findings to relevant policy-making bodies¹⁹, to reassess action plans, legislative framework on gender equality and elections, and funding. Tools used for the lobbying activities were face-to-face presentations of the findings from the survey/report and screening of a related documentary film²⁰.

- *Results*

To date, over 600 Roma women have been surveyed. The program is still in progress. The initial lobbying impacts of the program were positively reflected at the local level, where Municipal Centers for Social Work and Police Departments adopted many of the recommendations with regards to education and providing help to Roma women. Furthermore, public servants participated in many of the trainings, meetings and consultations conducted by the aforementioned network. The request for revision of the country's action plans is pending, but the fact that the members of the Parliamentary Commission recently decided to organize systematic visits to all 9 Roma communities involved is promising.

2. Organization: Foundation CURE, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Foundation CURE is a nongovernmental organization that focuses on feminist activism and raising political involvement/engagement of citizens²¹. Since the day it was established the organization's staff has trained more than 1000 persons, mainly women, to achieve their full potential. The long-term goal of this organization is to open Multimedia Resource Centre for girls and women of BiH where they will get access to expert knowledge, human and technological resources for enhancement of personal capabilities. The organization believes that feminism, as an agenda, heals and empowers individuals, communities, societies and women.

2.1. Program: Empowering the role of women in political life

Foundation CURE and a partner NGO INFOHOUSE thoroughly analyzed women's position in contemporary social and political life in BiH using the reports. In 2011 they published their findings and recommendations in a study titled "Empowering the role of women in political

¹⁹ Ministerial authorities, Centers for Social Justice, Gender Equality Agencies and Parliamentary Commissions

²⁰ <http://www.rightsforall.ba/eng/video.htm>

²¹ http://www.fondacijacure.org/index.php?do=article&article_id=14

life.”²² The organizations distributed it to all women interested in improving personal capacities and image regardless of their chosen field of work. 1000 copies have been distributed, and is available on the organization’s website.²³ The activists of these two NGOs advocate that women can be more politically empowered if they receive practical education and tips on how to successfully build and/or improve their personal and public image. The organizations’ efforts are directed in providing this education to all women in BiH. They address three aspects for attaining greater political empowerment:

- Building a good relationship with the media
- Building a successful political image
- Developing leadership skills

Relation of programs to political empowerment

Women today remain widely under-represented in decision-making processes ranging from the household to the national political level. This imbalance of power is historical and can be addressed through the creation of “rights-based” programs and equal opportunities. In order to secure greater access on the part of women to social, economic, and political resources, local authorities must recognize the issues of domestic violence and especially women’s human rights. Also, women themselves should be more aware of their rights and receive the tools and training to enable them to advantage of resources at their disposal. The empowerment of women in the society can be further facilitated through the setting up networks of women leaders and nongovernmental organizations’ which are able to effectively advocate and lobby for a change in status of those who are less empowered.

In order to measure the success of the implemented programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina region, both aforementioned organizations used quantitative indicators. These comprised of questionnaires, one to one meetings with the stakeholders and Roma women leaders. This methodology allowed them to collect information with regards to Roma women’s current standing in the community and socio-political life. They provided insights that caused the organizations to slightly modify their project and focus it on women’s human rights, domestic violence issues and creation of greater awareness. This was due to the field research results, which revealed information not known prior to program implementation.

²² <http://www.fondacijacure.org/uploads/infohouse%20prirucnik%202011.pdf>

²³ Ibid

Ultimately, a strong network of Roma women leaders was created (12) and several hundred women interviewed in total of 10 Bosnian Roma communities. This program is still ongoing as the program's findings are being currently used for lobbying efforts of the domestic government. However, the lobbying success so far was limited due to the long process of constituting the national governments after general elections in 2010.

Educational empowerment also plays a major role in promoting political empowerment. Only through education / informative efforts can full awareness of the broader legal and political environment take place. However, the educational/awareness-raising components of political empowerment programs can be hard to measure due to the fact that women's participation in Bosnian political life is below the levels even prescribed by the legislation. Creation of greater awareness is crucial as many Roma and other communities outside of large cities are simply disregarded and only targeted by the political leaders during pre-election seasons.

Chapter 2: Legal Empowerment

Definition

The concept of legal empowerment is one largely focused on the practical aspects of an individual's access to the legal services or alternative dispute resolution mechanisms²⁴; "it uses law as a tool for change – to empower citizens and communities as agents in their own development"²⁵. This concept lies "at the nexus of law and development,"²⁶ and focuses mainly on fostering what Rowland²⁷ would classify as **power to** (make decisions and institutional changes), **power with** (others, communities), and **power within** (oneself; self-esteem). Increasingly, donors like UNDP and the Asian Development Bank place emphasis on fostering all three of these types of power in legal empowerment initiatives (see below).

EXAMPLES OF LEGAL EMPOWERMENT-TARGETING PROGRAMS

In recent years, the burgeoning field of legal empowerment can be characterized as moving "downwards"—increasingly towards the grassroots level—and "outwards"—placing more emphasis on citizens' access to legally-mandated public goods and services in a decentralized state. While major development actors such as UNDP continue to emphasize the importance of a legislative framework for empowering disadvantaged populations²⁸, field research from pilot programs around the developing world additionally spotlights the need for context-specific, engaging programs wherein target populations not only have *de jure* access to rights (**power to**), but are aware of and engaged in accessing such rights and dispute resolution mechanisms²⁹ as individuals (**power within**) and communities (**power with**).

²⁴ Golub, S. (2003). "Beyond Rule of Law Orthodoxy: The Legal Empowerment Alternative." *Carnegie Working Paper no. 41* (October). Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

²⁵ "The Legal Approach to International Development" (2011). *White Paper*. Haki Legal Empowerment Network. <http://www.hakinetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Haki-Legal-Empowerment-White-Paper.pdf>

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ Cecilia Luttrell and Sitna Quiroz, with Claire Scrutton and Kate Bird, "Understanding and operationalizing empowerment", Overseas Development Institute, Working Paper 308, November 2009, available at www.odi.org.uk

²⁸ *Making the Law Work for Everyone. Volume I: Report of the Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor* (2008). New York: the Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor and United Nations Development Programme.

²⁹ "The Legal Approach to International Development" (2011). *Ibid*

For almost all major donors working in the development field, the past decade has brought a paradigmatic shift from macro-level rule-of-law based programs (e.g. judicial and legislative reform) to complementary micro-level programs³⁰. These “complementary” programs focus on the ability of the most vulnerable sub-sets of society to access the rights and services which are already legally theirs. A decade ago, development scholars and practitioners were calling for increased emphasis on the role of development, civil society and the poor, themselves, in increasing disadvantaged populations’ control over their own lives; this shift from “rule of law” reform to the more holistic approach of “legal empowerment” has since become the gold standard for donor organizations ranging from UNDP to OSF’s Justice initiative³¹.

1. Organization: Asian Development Bank, international

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is a multilateral development finance institution modeled after the World Bank. The ADB supports a wide range of programs across eleven “sectors” (e.g. agriculture, education) and ten “themes” (e.g. capacity development). Legal empowerment programs are funded under the auspices of poverty reduction, as such initiatives “build people’s knowledge, skills and confidence” contribute to not just macro-economic growth, but “inclusive growth,”³² or **power to** and **power within**. Two such legal empowerment programs are highlighted below.

1.1 Program: Legal Empowerment for Women and Disadvantaged Groups

In an effort to address Millennium Development Goals by bolstering legal empowerment in developing countries, ADB created and piloted a short-term technical assistance program targeting women and disadvantaged groups. This pilot project took place over the course of under a year in Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh and was implemented for the modest budget of \$550,000. Of note in this pilot program is the fact that the legal empowerment component pilot was always added to an ADB program already in progress. This is indicative of ADB’s integrated approach to empowerment. In all cases, the pilot project was initiated following the creation of a situational analysis report, which was then used to tailor legal empowerment initiatives to local contexts.

³⁰ *Making the Law Work for Everyone. Ibid.*

³¹ Golub, S. (2003). “Beyond Rule of Law Orthodoxy: The Legal Empowerment Alternative.” *Carnegie Working Paper no. 41* (October). Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

³² *Legal Empowerment for Women and Disadvantaged Groups: Final Report* (2009). Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, p. viii.

1.1.1. Indonesia: Neighborhood Upgrading and Shelter Sector Project³³

This program aimed to facilitate low income families' accessing of their legal rights and financial resources available to them via trainings and awareness-raising. The original loan program aimed to 1) improve low income families' access to plots of land, 2) increase families' opportunities to upgrade existing housing, 3) provide financing for shelter and 4) create a government-financed, de-centralized pro-poor shelter provision and financing system. The legal empowerment components added to this program included:

- Trainings on community planning of land space and legal documents for both citizens and community-level bureaucrats
- Trainings on loan documents (rights and responsibilities; critical legal thinking)
- Information campaign to non-participants on potential for enrollment
- Trainings for community administrator / site visit to the national land agency office (procedural information; problem-solving skills)

Outcome: participants indicated enthusiasm for information gained.

Pitfalls: short-term nature of the initiative and no further monitoring post-intervention made longer-term benefits (i.e. empowerment) impossible to determine.

1.1.2. Bangladesh: Second Small-Scale Water Resources Development Sector Project³⁴

This program utilized the local (non-traditional) dispute resolution mechanism space ("judicial forum") in order to facilitate sustainable agriculture and fishery production in communities whose livelihoods were dependent upon such. The legal components added to this program included:

- Training session at local judicial forum regarding rights and info dissemination (whole community; local authorities)
- Interactive "legal awareness fora" on legal rights (whole community)
- Issue-based drama presentation on a range of topics: illegal water management, decision-making procedures, human rights, domestic violence (whole community)

Outcomes: increased attendance at judicial fora; increased participation in judicial fora (particularly amongst women); increased understanding of legal rights³⁵; increased questions directed towards local judicial authorities

Pitfalls: local judicial authorities were unappreciative of increased scrutiny

³³ *Ibid*, p. 17.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 13.

³⁵ in comparison to a control group in another village

In all instances, ADB recognized that the short duration of pilot programs and monitoring thereof were insufficient. ADB emphasized that “legal empowerment is a long-term process and the best results are achieved over time.”³⁶

2. Organization: HALT – An Organization of Americans for Legal Reform, Washington, DC

Over 30 years old and holding the title of the U.S.’s largest legal reform organization³⁷, HALT represents a citizen-supported effort to make America’s well-established civil justice system more accessible to all members of society. Since its inception, the organization has focused primarily on the twin pillars of legal reform advocacy and educating citizens on how to access the *status quo* system. As the founder of HALT explains, change in the legal system can be long in coming, and people need to exercise their rights *now*³⁸.

2.1 Program: Education services

This focuses on creating and disseminating information about individuals’ rights and the procedures involved in accessing the civil justice system. In order to pursue this goal, HALT produces free brochures and pamphlets as well as full-length (low-cost) books on a range of topics, from accessing free or low-cost legal services to tenants’ rights and how to claim social benefits. Additionally, from its office in Washington, DC, the organization responds to all individuals’ requests (via post, e-mail or telephone) for information about local legal aid services anywhere in the U.S.³⁹.

2.2. Program: Advocacy efforts

HALT advocates before bar associations, legislatures and courts for reforms in five major areas:

- Freedom of information
- Small claims court reform
- Lawyer accountability
- Legal Consumer’s Bill of Rights
- Judicial integrity

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 30.

³⁷ <http://www.halt.org/about halt/>

³⁸ (HALT founder) Paul Hasse. “An Interview with HALT’s Founder” (1998). *The Legal Reformer* (summer). <https://halt.org/about halt/paul hasse.php>

³⁹ “Where do I go for legal help?” *Citizens Legal Guide*, p. 4.

<http://www.halt.org/lic/internet brochures/Where Do I Go for Help-Client Kit.pdf>

In the words of founder Paul Hasse, one of the major challenges in the organization's early years was being able to substantively accomplish its goals of advocacy and education—to “pull of what you said you were going to do”; in the education field, this meant producing high quality educational materials, and in the advocacy area, this meant “working with legislators and building coalitions and producing thoughtful materials about reform”⁴⁰. As such, HALT measures its success in quantity of educational materials accessed and state-level legislative and bar association reforms.

Relation of programs to legal empowerment

While the Asian Development Bank and HALT's programs both foster legal empowerment by enabling citizens to better use existing administrative mechanisms, how they operationalized this common objective diverges. While HALT emphasizes the creation and availability of practical informational “tools” (e.g. self-help guides, databases of legal aid resources), the ADB additionally emphasizes a more interactive methodology in introducing these tools, in which skill-building via hands-on training is central. Both methods target building citizens' **power to**.

The approach taken by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in targeting legal empowerment for women and disadvantaged groups, focuses program objectives and its quantitative and qualitative indicators around a set of “four mutually-reinforcing components”: 1) confidence (**power within**) and 2) knowledge, 3) strategies and 4) outcomes (**power to**)⁴¹. Functionally, programs focusing on these objectives often take the shape of initiatives on labor rights, business rights and rule of law, similar to those of the UNDP and other major international funders.

In terms of measuring “success,” HALT relies on continued user-initiated retrieval of information materials (as well as monetary support received by individual donors) as an indirect indication of user interest and/or satisfaction. However, ADB's far more program-based approach aims to measure not only beneficiary *access* to information, but directly

⁴⁰ “An Interview with HALT's Founder” (1998). *The Legal Reformer* (summer).
https://halt.org/about/halt/paul_hasse.php

⁴¹ *Legal Empowerment for Women and Disadvantaged Groups: Final Report* (2009). Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Asian Development Bank.

surveys participants on *perceived efficacy* of the program⁴². ADB considers this survey component as a “significant step forward in empowerment activities” and a tool for tailoring future initiatives in the field⁴³.

Both organizations contend that equitable access to the legal systems (and the benefits it provides) is a right for all fractions of the population. ADP additionally frames legal empowerment as fundamentally based on economic empowerment. Other actors in the development field also emphasize the importance of explicitly integrating programs targeting *legal* and *political* empowerment: “to succeed, legal empowerment has to lead to systemic change, including institutional reform...Political leadership is imperative”⁴⁴. Thus legal empowerment is increasingly viewed as part of an interlocking system of rights to access resources, the knowledge, skills and confidence to do so and the capacity to expand access to others.

⁴² in building skills and confidence in accessing the legal system

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. ix.

⁴⁴ *Making the Law Work for Everyone. Ibid*, p. 22.

Chapter 3: Educational Empowerment

Definition

Although it often makes up a significant part of any empowerment project, educational empowerment lacks a precise definition. However, much work has been done by the international and national empowerment organizations, and they share a number of characteristics: if being empowered means to have freedom in and control over one's own life, being educationally empowered would mean to have access to a quality education without being discriminated against on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender, age or socio-economic status⁴⁵.

Educational empowerment's main dimension is clearly **power to**. By ensuring access to education, especially for women and girls, ethnic and religious minorities, improving or creating conditions for their attendance, by offsetting the cost of school attendance, organizations can provide beneficiaries with the opportunity to continue their education, find (better) jobs and live a better life—and, in so doing, obtain the **power to** influence the existing structures in the society. Many projects emphasize the **power within** the target group, allowing them to develop their skills and talents, get knowledge outside the classroom and thus making them more confident, well-rounded individuals and giving them a way to express themselves.

Since those who are discriminated against on the basis of gender, religion or ethnic origin, they may have internalized these perceptions and developed a low sense of self-worth. The success of an educational empowerment initiative lies partially in changing the self-image of the discriminated group, in addition to changing how the rest of the society and the government see them. For this reason, part of the case studies presented include a policy dimension that is not part of a power dimension classification, but is nevertheless important, as it allows for a long-term institutionalized change.

⁴⁵ World Bank (2001). "What is Empowerment?" *World Development Report 2000/2001 – Attacking Poverty*. Available online: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/486312-1095094954594/draft2.pdf>

Experience shows that the early education has the highest return on investment of any poverty intervention⁴⁶, and thus ensuring the access to quality education for children has become a key component of educational empowerment projects. The following part will present two early education projects of two organizations, working in Hungary, Romania and a number of other Eastern European and Balkan countries.

EXAMPLES of EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT-TARGETING PROGRAMS

1. Organization: Roma Education Fund, Hungary

Roma Education Fund was established within the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, with the support of the European Union in general and governments of ten individual participant-countries in particular. The organization cooperates with a number of big organizations, such as UN bodies (UNDP, UN-HABITAT, UNHCR, UNICEF), World Health Organization, the World Bank and Open Society Foundation as well as with local NGOs in participant countries, such as Chance for Children Foundation (CFCF) in Hungary, the Civic Association Equalizing Opportunities in Slovakia, National Roma Centrum (NRC) in Macedonia, etc.

“A Good Start” is one of the core programs of the organization, as it targets the youngest members of the Roma community, the children from zero to six/seven years of age and sets a foundation for their further achievements and successes.

1.1. Program: A Good Start

Started in summer 2010, “A Good Start” (AGS) program, run by REF in cooperation with 15 local NGOs promotes pre-school education for children of up to six/seven years of age in 16 locations in four countries – Hungary, Slovakia, Macedonia and Romania⁴⁷. The program emphasizes the importance of the early childhood education and care as a key to further

⁴⁶ See, for example, James J. Heckman & Dimitriy V. Masterov, 2007. “The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children,” *NBER Working Papers* 13016, National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc.

⁴⁷ Roma Education Fund (2010), “2010 Annual Report”. Available online: http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/ref_annual2011_singlepage_s.pdf

education and employment. The survey shows that the Roma households face various barriers, such as low employment chances, low salaries, early parenthood, etc.⁴⁸

The realization of empowerment by REF focuses on two power dimensions: **power to** and **power within**, it also has a facilitating **policy** dimension. They are practically expressed in four dimensions of the AGS project: *facilitation* of school attendance by children – **power to**; *community work*, which includes work with kids, parents and cooperation between parents and teachers – **power within**, *improvement of schools* - **policy**, *lobbying* in the local and national government - **policy**. The **power to** approach is the main objective of the REF's work, as it aims to ensure equal access to education for Roma children, in order to allow them to continue education, find a better job and live a better life.

In order to strengthen the outcome, the REF also supports projects that fall into **power within** dimension. Through development of various skills and talents of children and their parents, and facilitating their cooperation with the education system in their countries, the REF aims to build a sense of self-confidence and self-worth that might have suffered as a result of long-term segregation and discrimination policies. A part of REF's work is to make sure the power to and power within are exercised. For this reason, the AGS includes work towards policy change, such as school conditions and government approach. However, to date the REF reports no significant change, schools serving Roma children remain in poor conditions and segregation persists.

FACILITATION: POWER TO

Transportation. In a province of Craiova-Mofleni of Romania the REF and its partner Romani CRISS accompanies the children to class; in Vinica, Macedonia, a bus is provided to those who live far from the school.

Tuition fees, clothes and school supplies. In almost all participant countries the Roma communities live in poverty and cannot afford to buy the supplies for school and clothes for the children and pay their tuition. The REF and local partner NGOs have been providing the necessary aid for the children.

⁴⁸ Roma Education Fund (2011), "2011 Annual Report". Available online: http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/ref_annual2011_singlepage_s.pdf

Language. In Zborov, Slovakia, the language barrier was often found to be a problem. For this reason, the REF and its local partner asked the government for a Romanes-Slovakian translator.

Lack of places. The province of Abranovce, Slovakia lacked free places in the preschool. The REF and Equal Chances organized informal study groups, carried out by a mediator and a family assistant.

COMMUNITY WORK: POWER WITHIN

Health. In Banska Bystrica, Slovakia, the low enrollment rates were partially due to poor health conditions of the Roma community members. The REF and local NGO KARI provided home visits, medical assistance, and organized immunization of children and prenatal care for the mothers, and conducted health related events for the community.

Additional training and skills development. In several provinces of Romania new community centers were opened, and provide after school education for children. This allows for improvement of their command of language, interpersonal skills, cognitive and personal development. In Telechiu, Romania, with an increased attention and trainings, as well as use of the ISSA-developed Child Portfolio, the children showed improved communication skills, better command of Romanian language and a level of development appropriate to their age.

“Meséd” or “Your Tale”. The REF with the help of the partner NGOs organizes seminars for parents and community members on a regular basis. In Hungary, a project called “Meséd” or “Your Tale”, aimed at helping mothers in the upbringing of their children, improving their literacy late and developing various skills have proven to be effective. After a nine-month course, some mothers were able to find jobs, and have possibly become more active participants in the life of their community.

Home School Community Liason (HSCL). In Hungary, a HSCL program promotes cooperation between parents and teachers. Once a week parents come to preschool and teach a class (arts, sport, etc.). In this way, they get a chance to understand the teachers work and show their talents and teachers benefit from increased involvement of parents, and this allows for a positive influence on the development of children. The program showed good results, and there is an interest in continuing the project.

IMPROVING SCHOOLS: POLICY

Poor facilities and conditions. In Eastern Macedonia, REF covered the tuition fees for children, however, the lack of facilities and poor condition of the buildings still limit the enrollment and participation of children in education.

Segregation. In Zborov, Slovakia, the enrollment in mainstream education was a challenge, since some of the Roma children targeted in the program failed to enroll and had to go to the preparatory class first, which increases their chances to end up in a segregated class. In Martin, Slovakia, the REF and its local partner are lobbying against the segregation in schools, though with no success so far.

2. Organization: Ovidiu Ro, Romania

Ovidiu Ro (OvR) is a Romanian NGO with a mission “to make early education standard public policy” in Romania⁴⁹. The organization currently emphasizes the connection between an educated workforce and the economic performance of the country—a message which differs substantially than that of earlier years, wherein providing pre-school to under-served populations was positioned primarily as a moral imperative. Over the course of its eight-year history, the organization has focused on providing the same core programs—empowering poor families and communities to overcome economic and social barriers to sending their children to school (**power to** and **power with**). Ovidiu Ro strongly emphasizes that economic, and not “cultural”, barriers stand in the way of Roma parents enrolling and sending their children to school, and has designed a program with strong economic and social engagement components (**power to** and **power with**) to counteract such⁵⁰.

However, the organization has noticeably shifted how it frames this work, including its target group of beneficiaries, from “Roma families” to “disadvantaged families.” The organization went one step further on July 1, 2012, changing its name from Ovidiu Rom (associated by Romanian speakers with “Roma”) to Ovidiu Ro (associated with “Romania”)⁵¹. The organization has increasingly shifted to using transparent, means-tested criteria⁵² to

⁴⁹ Ovidiu Rom, Overview. <http://www.ovid.ro/en/strategy-and-programs/overview/>

⁵⁰ See, especially, page 8 of “Learning from America’s Mistakes: A Proposal for Closing the Gap between Children of Roma Descent and Other Children in the European Union – STARTING WITH ROMANIA” *Ovidiu Rom White Paper*, August 2008. Available at: http://www.ovid.ro/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/eng_white_paper_1_aug.pdf

⁵¹ Ovidiu Ro, Founder’s Message: <http://www.ovid.ro/en/about-us/founders-message/>

⁵² Eligible households cannot earn over €42 per month per family member, must live in sub-standard housing and parents must have a low education level. Additionally, households in the

select communities and households with which to work. Although the communities and households served are often overwhelming Romani (as Roma disproportionately occupy under-served communities), OvR’s messaging on providing services to *impoverished* families and not just *Roma* families may allow it to garner more broad-based public and/or political support in a society which “harbours one of the worst cases of social stigma (against Roma) in Europe”⁵³.

2.1. Program: Every Child in Pre-School

Ovidiu Ro’s decade-long experience in educational empowerment led it to focus on early childhood education, expressed in its flagship Every Child in Pre-School program (“*Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță*” in Romanian). This program’s activities cover two dimensions of empowerment: **power to** and **power with**. Ovidiu Ro (OvR) has a strong orientation towards these dimensions as a result of its work to improve children’s motivation and ability to (**power to**) attend school, and its integration of community and schools in making this happen (**power with**). It has achieved impressive results. The **power to** dimension is especially strong, as OvR has succeeded in enabling low-income households to send their children to school (80% of the 1300 children participating —all of which came from households below the poverty line— had 100% attendance over the school year; the vast majority of these students were not previously enrolled at all, or attended preschool only sporadically)⁵⁴.

MOTIVATION AND FACILITATION: POWER TO

OvR developed a set of tools to overcome the economic and social barriers to families sending their children to school; these center around “covering the hidden costs of education” (school supplies, transport, food), engaging parents and communities in the educational system, and utilizing a relatively new development tool called “conditional cash

pilot phase must have lived in or near the 17 communities across the country wherein the pilot was running. See: Seghedi, A., M. Gheorgheiu and L. Hawke (2011). “The Education Gap ‘Tipping Point.’” *Report to Minister of Education – Fiecare copil în grădiniță: First year results*. Asociația Ovidiu Rom. <http://www.ovid.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/August-Report-to-Education-Minister.pdf>

⁵³ Nicolae, V. and Slavik, H. “Being a ‘Gypsy’: The Worst Social Stigma in Romania,” *European Roma Rights Centre*, <http://www.errc.org/article/being-a-gypsy-the-worst-social-stigma-in-romania/1385> . Accessed 4 May 2012.

⁵⁴ Seghedi, A., M. Gheorgheiu and L. Hawke (2011). “The Education Gap ‘Tipping Point.’” *Report to Minister of Education – Fiecare copil în grădiniță: First year results*. Asociația Ovidiu Rom. <http://www.ovid.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/August-Report-to-Education-Minister.pdf>

transfers,” which ties financial benefits received by participating families to students’ school attendance⁵⁵.

Each participating family receives clothes, school supplies at the start of the school year and €15⁵⁶ in food vouchers monthly (€12 in the July 2011-February 2012 period⁵⁷) for each child with 100% attendance in that month⁵⁸. Participating families have indicated all of these elements as essential; some had previously not sent their children for shame of not being able to dress their child appropriately. For some of the poorest families, the monthly food vouchers gained via the program represents a much-needed source of additional income.

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL WORK: POWER WITH

Like REF’s A Good Start, OvR’s program provides additional training to teachers in participating communities, engages parents in the registration process and brings them into the classroom as assistants, and has a community-school liaison component. Unlike “A Good Start”, the “Every Child in Pre-School” program does not organize after-school classes and emphasize development of other skills and talents. However, Ovidiu Rom was able to overcome issues A Good Start faced regarding limited space by working closely with teachers and local government officials to ensure “spillover” classrooms. Teachers are also given a stipend of €15 per student to defray the cost of additional materials. In addition to over 80% of the students “sponsored” by OvR achieving perfect attendance—a 40% increase in perfect attendance in comparison to the previous year—an unexpected spillover effect was an increase in attendance rates of children *not* engaged in the program who shared a school building with the high-attending OvR participants (**power with**).

Relation of programs to educational empowerment

The education organizations presented in this report concentrate their efforts in two dimensions of empowerment. They lobby for change in the national governments, thus promoting taking the **power to** approach. Their main focus is providing education and skills trainings for the communities, thus strengthening the **power with**. However, educational

⁵⁵ <http://www.ovid.ro/en/programs/family-support/>

⁵⁶ Alina Seghedi, Maria Gheorghiu and Leslie Hawke (2011). “The Education Gap “Tipping Point”. Ovidiu Rom. Available online: <http://www.ovid.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/August-Report-to-Education-Minister.pdf>

⁵⁷ Ovidiu Rom (2012). “Mid-year report July 2011-February 2012”. Available online: <http://www.ovid.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Mid-Year-Report-July-2011-February-2012.pdf>

⁵⁸ A doctor’s note or parent’s note for “sick days” counts as an excused absence and does not count against a child’s attendance record.

empowerment is not done in isolation from other areas, such as political and economic empowerment, and both organizations have included these aspects in the scope of their work. By providing food vouchers (Ovidiu Ro, “Every Child in Pre-School”) and paying tuition fees (both organizations) for the Roma community members, they made sure that the family can afford to send their child to school. Both organizations are giving the community **power to** facilitate school attendance. For example, OvR organizes buses that take children to and from school (“Every Child in Pre-School”). Of the two, REF has the stronger policy component and is able to effectively lobby for the Roma rights, focusing on giving under-served populations the **power to**.

Educational empowerment is inseparable from the other areas: political, social and economic empowerment. Education is the means by which organizations can raise community awareness of their political and human rights. By organizing skills trainings and special courses for mothers, the organizations help women in the process of upbringing (“*Meséd*”, REF), help them navigate the educational system (OvR and REF) and foster cooperation between parents and schools. *Meséd* had been particularly successful, because some mothers were able to find jobs after a few months of training organized by REF and local partners. In this way, REF was able to bridge the gap between social and economic empowerment by helping these women find a stable income. Conversely, OvR’s policy of offsetting the cost of education with food vouchers for the duration of children’s participation in the program means that the family will lose this source of income upon the child’s “aging out” of the program.

When discussing the success of their programs, both organizations mainly refer to numbers. The REF has developed a set of three tools for impact assessment, all of which are quantitative. They gather data on the number of Roma people employed by the organization, the amount of money provided in grants, number of students participating in various projects. Ovidiu Ro relies on quantitative methods as well, providing the data on program coverage, attendance rates, etc. The lack of qualitative analysis can be explained by the fact that most of these projects are recent and their impact may not be seen until much later, when the project beneficiaries graduate and seek employment. Additionally, both organizations acknowledge the slow nature of change, both in policy and in society; new ways of thinking and policy-making—both about and within Roma communities— will be measured in years or even generations, not over the course of a single grant cycle.

Chapter 4: Economic Empowerment

Definition

An empowerment approach oriented on economic activity is mostly concerned with providing access to markets and incomes so that people can participate in economic decision-making. As Jo Rowlands argues, “it is about individuals being able to maximize the opportunities available to them without or despite constraints of structure and State.”⁵⁹ Hence, considering the classification into four types of power relations⁶⁰, economic empowerment could be seen through the lens of all these types. Firstly, empowerment as **power to** results in an increased capacity to act, either in terms of improved financial situation or financial literacy, stable housing etc. Secondly, **power with** is pursued when individuals and communities are economically empowered through collaboration with each other by building alliances and collective action.

However, several possible pitfalls must be stressed from the beginning. Economic empowerment is not only about having the opportunity to access economic decision-making. First and foremost economic empowerment must include the awareness of people affected that they are “entitled to occupy that decision-making space.”⁶¹ In other words, people involved in empowerment processes must deem themselves capable to act and have influence. Only afterwards can the economic empowerment be identified as **power within**.

The concept of economic empowerment is sometimes used interchangeably with the concept of development. Yet the distinction should be made between these two notions. While development is usually done “for” somebody and it is accompanied with economic growth and profit, economic empowerment should not be imposed to someone and is not necessarily positively correlated with the economic growth. Accordingly, programs related to economic empowerment should always stress the importance of the **power to** dimension.

The understanding of economic empowerment as a *process* that is independent from other types of empowerment (e.g. social, political etc.) might be also highly problematic. Even though the central element of projects related to economic empowerment is the

⁵⁹ Jo Rowlands.1995. “Empowerment Examined.” *Development in Practice*, Volume 5, No. 2.

⁶⁰ Cecilia Luttrell and Sitna Quiroz, with Claire Scrutton and Kate Bird, “Understanding and operationalizing empowerment”, Overseas Development Institute, Working Paper 308, November 2009, available at www.odi.org.uk

⁶¹ Ibid.

enhancement of economic opportunities, the success of such projects is often very much dependent from other areas as well. Sole economic activities may but also may not lead to wished outcomes accompanying economic empowerment such as self-esteem, analytical skills etc. According to Mr. Balazs Horvath, an UNDP expert on Poverty Reduction, there must be certain threshold of all types of empowerment in order to be successful in achieving some of them.

In addition, as the empowerment has the process-based nature, desired outcomes of the projects cannot be measured only by quantifiable indicators using traditional methods of project evaluation, but there is a need to consider qualitative, context-specific criteria as well.

EXAMPLES of ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT-TARGETING PROGRAMS

Economic empowerment comprises many different activities and programs. Their main common feature is the goal of giving economic opportunities to economically disadvantaged or marginalized individuals or communities. Some areas of economic empowerment activities are:

- microfinance / Loans with low interest rates are given to target communities in order to enable them to start their own small business
- financial literacy
- business training
- self-employment programs
- community-based programs (ecotourism etc.)
- land rights / Enhancing “bargaining power” of communities

1. Organization: Habitat for Humanity⁶², Slovakia Country Office

Description of the program

Habitat for Humanity works in more than 90 countries and more than 3,000 communities worldwide. Through volunteer labor and donations of money and materials, Habitat builds and rehabilitates simple, decent houses with the help of the homeowner families. Habitat

⁶² <http://www.habitat.org>

houses are then sold to partner families at no profit and financed with affordable loans. The homeowners' monthly mortgage payments go into a Revolving Fund that is used to build or renovate still more Habitat houses. In addition to a down payment and the monthly mortgage payments, homeowners invest hundreds of hours of their own labor into building their Habitat home and the homes of others.

The following examples of Habitat projects in Slovakia were selected because they are both relevant for economic empowerment and nicely illustrate that not always all the power dimensions cannot always be approached directly.

1.1 Program: *Microloans for home improvements*

In rural areas of Slovakia, many homes are not properly insulated and protected from harsh winter conditions. Low-income, predominately Roma, families cannot afford to renovate their homes and install proper windows and doors. They are forced to pay lavish sums for heat, as prices for utilities have risen sharply. At the same time, they cannot obtain loans from commercial banks, as they are deemed unreliable clients.

Since 2004, Habitat for Humanity has been working in Slovakia in partnership with a local nonprofit organization, Environmental Training Project (ETP) Slovakia. At first, it was providing small home-improvement loans for a Roma community in the east of the country. Later, Habitat activities expanded to several towns and villages in the same region.

1.2 Program: *Financial education*

In partnership with the Citi Foundation, Habitat for Humanity is providing financial education trainings to new, potential or existing Habitat homeowners who, through the training, gain the skills and tools needed to become more financially literate and capable. By attending workshops of financial education designed to teach credit, savings, and money management the families are better prepared to gain access to and manage microfinance loan products for housing and microenterprise and to manage their financial assets more effectively.

Relation of program to economic empowerment

In light of the outlined activities, Habitat for Humanity seems to integrate the concept of economic empowerment in their mission, however, not in all power dimensions. The most

visible dimension is **power to**. Through the provision of the microloans and financial education, targeted people are empowered to improve their own houses and gain own financial literacy. Thus, **power within** may be built as the higher status which accompanies higher economic status. Other two dimensions, power over and power with can be however present only indirectly and projects themselves are not aimed at supporting them.

As already mentioned, economic empowerment is a *process* a therefore should not be “output-oriented” but rather focused on the impact and beneficiaries. This aspect seems to be diminished in case of Habitat for Humanity, wherein the main indicators of program “success” are the purely-quantitative number of beneficiaries. The main mission is to provide decent accommodation through building as many Habitat houses as possible.

Despite the fact that analyzed activities of Habitat for Humanity do not directly target women as so the *gender dimension* is not stressed, women are approached at least indirectly through the support of entire families. In this regard, we can talk rather about community empowerment which is also in line with the opinion of Mr. Dik: “HFH has the role of “building communities”. Yet the question remains, whether by families are not meant only homeowners who are usually men. If only homeowners are approached by workshops related to house renewal or financial literacy, then the effectiveness and potential for balanced development of community is seriously endangered. Therefore much more attention should be given to the composition of targeted families and the real impacts of the projects.

2. Organization: UNDP- Bratislava Regional Centre for Europe and CIS⁶³

Description of the program

United Nations Development Program advocates for human development and integrating the Millennium Development Goals into national development strategies. UNDP Regional Centre Bratislava which is focused on the area of Europe and Commonwealth of Independent states (former members of the Soviet Union) build on this mission and at the same time works in several broad thematic areas related to development such as democratic governance, capacity development etc.

⁶³ <http://europeandcis.undp.org>

The most relevant area for the purposes of this research paper is poverty reduction, which is divided into the following projects and initiatives: Social inclusion, Millennium Development Goals, Aid for Trade, Growing inclusive business, Civic engagement and Public finance for development. Noteworthy are mainly those projects which are directly related to economic empowerment, namely “Aid for Trade” and “Growing Inclusive Business” projects. Accordingly, these projects were for this reason selected for further analysis.

2.1 Program: “Aid for Trade”

This project⁶⁴ works in eleven countries in the region and has developed nationally specific interventions. All activities are carried out jointly with national partners so that beneficiaries can develop the skills that will allow them to better gain from trade. The project assists small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and farmers as they strengthen their capacities throughout the entire business process – from planning, management and finance to processing, standards, branding, market access and productive capacities.

2.2 Program: “Growing Inclusive Business”⁶⁵

This initiative demonstrates how businesses can profit while also having a positive effect on people and the environment. Inclusive businesses can gain new customers, expand their workforce and strengthen supply and delivery chains and generate profit - and people living in poverty can access new jobs and sources of income, helping to meet their basic needs.

One of the success stories is the inclusive business of a carpet manufacturer in Azerbaijan, who took over a formerly state-owned enterprise. Nowadays it maintains traditional carpet weaving techniques, uses natural dyes, and employs 140 women, who make up the majority of its workforce. Another best-practice is Edipack in Albania that produces packaging from recycled materials that it sources from local small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and Roma micro-entrepreneurs. In this way, supporting economic development indirectly supports economic opportunity for the year.

Relation of program to economic empowerment

In the UNDP projects described above, the concept of economic empowerment is central. As noted by Mr. Balazs Horvath, the leader of the Poverty Reduction Practice UNDP, “there is a mainstream where the market works OK. But in the spheres where market fails to deliver an

⁶⁴ <http://europeandcis.undp.org/poverty>

⁶⁵ Ibid.

equitable outcome there is a need for intervention. And this is where UNDP comes in.” This suggestion expresses the clear goal of UNDP to achieve appropriate access to market for everyone which can be regarded as **power to**.

As Mr. Horvath further mentioned, the most affected are poor people as well as people who experience social exclusion which “overlaps with economic exclusion but it goes beyond that, because it covers also access to social services and social networks.” This targets **power within**. The **power with** dimension of economic empowerment can be also identified in case of UNDP. Through strengthening business capacities of SMEs for instance in branding or other integrating trade issues, local producers are required to cooperate with each other and form alliances in order to achieve better business results.

It should be highlighted that UNDP recognizes the importance of both external and internal empowerment. As Mr. Balazs expressed, “economic empowerment is a desirable state, an outcome, a result of the interplay of various actors either internal or external.” Solely external empowerment would be very inefficient, whereas solely internal empowerment would be restrictive as well. Yet the expression of Mr. Balazs also shows that the understanding of empowerment is rather output-oriented and hence is not in line with *process-based character* of empowerment. Instead of “desirable state”, economic empowerment should be regarded as a long-lasting, complex way to achieve desired outcomes.

Particular attention is paid by UNDP to both poor and socially excluded populations such as Roma, women and disabled people. In the words of Mr. Horvath: “Roma are both a poor and socially excluded minority, which means a huge loss of human potential and also has economic impacts.” That is one of the reasons they should be economically incorporated. Right now UNDP is working on social protection systems, because “disabled or handicapped people should be able to get employed. And there are remarkably cheap ways how to achieve that. And suddenly you have a whole new audience.” Yet the gender dimension of economic empowerment is regarded as highest priority: “If you go to Central Asia we have even more smashing argument that is not about Roma, because due to exclusion of women they are missing half of their human capital.”

It is worth mentioning that UNDP not only uses the concept of economic empowerment frequently, they simultaneously try to enhance other types of empowerment: “Having enforceable property rights is critical for the poor to become a part of market based activities.” This is what links economic and legal empowerment. In addition, the distinction between individual and collective empowerment is not very sharp, but it can be observed that UNDP is mostly focused on empowerment at the community level: “We go to rural areas where is a number of things that stand in the way of creating jobs or self-employment. We usually work with municipalities and local communities.”

Recommendations and conclusions

The sections below provide recommendations for the fine-tuning of RIO programs across each of the four targeted dimensions of empowerment. The four RIO “case study” programs selected for concrete feedback across these dimensions are: 1) “My Dream,” run by Colorful Pearls Association for Southerner Roma Women (training and personal development for Roma women), 2) a program run by Roma Center Skopje (capacity-building of Romani women leaders and activists), 3) a program run by ROMA SOS (fostering activism in Roma girls) and 4) Roma Mothers’ Empowerment Center run by OSF in partnership with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (one of the ongoing operational activities of RIO). Following these recommendations, the policy paper concludes with several key lessons drawn from the research.

Recommendations for political empowerment

Create more-formal networks of women leaders

In order to have more successful political empowerment oriented programs, the creation of women leaders’ networks is essential. This was evident in the case of the program conducted by Rights for All organization in BiH. Their research indicated that female Roma leaders play a crucial role in process of gaining and/or sharing knowledge about women’s human rights and domestic violence, especially within Roma communities. This was due primarily because to their ability to develop a long lasting trust based relationship with Roma women. However, for these sorts of advocacy networks to deliver desired and quantifiable results, a more formal, incentivized approach would be needed than that of RIO’s Roma Center Skopje (RCS) project.

There is no indication that the RCS project secured a sense of buy-in among network leaders to program goals and objectives. The informal network created by RCS lacked women leaders from different backgrounds, i.e. successful politicians, academics, experts, who could build the aforementioned type of relationship. Furthermore, RCS’s purpose was not clearly defined. As the issue of political empowerment has a wide spectrum it is of pivotal importance for the network to ensure an evidence-based output (report, or any other type of official document/evidence) that can be used for further activities, such as lobbying, which can lead to a concrete policy change and/or improved implementation of existing legal frameworks.

Insist on inclusion of relevant government officials

Many empowerment programs are well designed for raising awareness and increasing levels of knowledge of women from rural areas. More relevance should be placed on securing continuous government support for these types of programs. The government officials rarely show high support for project events or this support is expressed in purely demagogical manner, which was evident in projects implemented by Colorful Pearls Association for Southerner Roma Women (CPA) and Roma Center Skopje (RCS). Neither CPA nor RCS specified how they would attempt to secure this government support or establish partnerships. In the future, more emphasis should be placed on devising new ways of including government representatives in all project (design and) implementation phases.

Increase the sustainability and awareness of Women Empowerment Centers

The creation of women empowerment centers, as envisaged by Roma Organization for Multicultural Affirmation S.O.S. – Prilep (ROMA S.O.S.) aims to provide better access to legal aid, health care, education and/or the job market. However, the sustainability of such centers is always difficult for civil society organizations as they are purely dependent on donor funds. In order to achieve greater sustainability, these centers should be “run” by civil society experts but at least partially funded by the government. ROMA S.O.S. (and other RIO beneficiaries) should be made aware of the recent government programs that emerged in several Central and Eastern European countries in which taxpayers may allocate a certain percentage of their due tax expenditure to a civil society organization (“percentage philanthropy”⁶⁶). These efforts could aid in the sustainability of much-needed empowerment centers in this particular region. These activities should include efforts towards awareness-raising and government inclusion through advocacy and lobbying.

Recommendations for legal empowerment*Strengthen advocacy toolkit*

Advocacy work—influencing adoption or implementation of laws which specifically or disproportionately affect Roma— is a core objective in two of the four RIO programs analyzed (that of the Roma Center Skopje (RCS) and ROMA SOS). In the case of Roma Center Skopje, this takes the form of national-level capacity-building and networking for Roma

⁶⁶ For further information on percentage philanthropy programs in Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia and Romania, see: <http://szazalekosadomany.honlaphat.hu/>

women activists, whereas ROMA SOS seeks to influence local policies as part of a program to empower future Romani women activists. However, in both of these programs, advocacy work is part-time or takes an ad-hoc approach, tackling issues as they arise using tools like open letters to government officials and awareness-raising campaigns. This approach is contrary to the longer-term model recommended by both Asian Development Bank and HALT, as well as regional policy advocacy experts like the International Center for Policy Advocacy (formerly and Open Society initiative⁶⁷). As such, targeted capacity-building for NGOs and individuals advocating for policy changes is recommended, in order to increase the likelihood of their efforts having measurable effects, both in terms of building participant skill sets and improving policy outcomes.

Focus in on providing local access to existing legal resources

Changes in law are often slow in coming, while under-served populations need immediate access to the rights and resources that many existing laws provide. Thus, in addition to supporting advocacy at the judicial and legislative level, a bridge between the existing system and citizens is needed. Both of the legal empowerment case studies (the Asian Development Bank and HALT) emphasized the importance of awareness-raising, one-on-one support, and access to local legal services for under-served populations. While two of the four RIO programs (Colorful Pearls Association and RIO's Roma Mothers' Empowerment Centers) include community-level awareness-raising about health and employment issues, neither specifically targets helping Roma women exercise their legal right to services. As such, integration of this element is recommended in order to bolster the legal empowerment of this population.

Of RIO's programs, the Mothers' / Women's Empowerment Centers are best positioned to provide this service, as their long-term goal is to establish themselves as a resource center for a variety of needs and issues affecting Roma women and their communities. Thus, integrating information on how to access legal services, or even periodic "office hours" from these service providers (e.g. ombudsman, administrative officials) held within the Centers is recommended.

Recommendations for educational empowerment

Complement programs for adolescents /adults with a strong focus on early education

⁶⁷ www.policyadvocacy.org

RIO's current programs focus primarily on educational empowerment for older girls and adults, rather than at the primary and pre-school levels, where the potential for getting students engaged in the educational system and up-to speed for academic achievement is the highest⁶⁸. The seminars, workshops and trainings are designed to raise awareness and help to promote gender equality, maternal health, employment, or local advocacy. Except for English language teaching (RWI project) the other events are ad-hoc and short-term. This might be the case because the target age group is adults (the girls are included in gender equality issues), and at this age it can be difficult for them to go through a formal academic-type education process, which will also require time that they don't have.

However, as it was shown on the examples of "A Good Start" and "Every Child in Pre-School" early educational attainment of children is essential to their ability to continue education, find a job and become equal members of society. This is true for both Roma men and women, but especially important for latter, as they suffer from double discrimination – as Roma and as women, and are usually more poor and less likely to be employed than men⁶⁹

In addition to the community work focus, it is recommended to:

- Focus especially on young children and ensure their ability to attend school regularly (see Ovidiu Ro case study);
- Develop their other skills and talents through after-school classes, workshops and trainings, as it positively influences their cognitive skills and makes them well-rounded as individuals;
- Ensure follow-up, in the sense that the children should have the chance to continue their education beyond the life/scope of the program. Supporting children only to a certain age puts the efforts of the child and his/her family at risk and could waste the financial resources of RIO;
- Influence policy making through cooperation with the government in order to institutionalize the improvement in education system, desegregation and *de facto* equal access

⁶⁸ See "Preschool Education and Its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications", W. Steven Barnett, Rutgers University, Sept 2008; and David Boulton, *New York Times*, December 24, 2010.

⁶⁹ Corsi, M., Crepaldi, C., Samek Lodovici, M., Boccagni, P., Vasilescu, C. (2008) "Ethnic Minority and Roma Women in Europe: A Case for Gender Equality?". European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, G.1 Unit. Available online: ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=4833&langId=en

Recommendations for economic empowerment

“Micro” level: Pair job training with local employment opportunities

The project “My Dream”—addressing personal development of Romani women in Hungary—is directly related to economic empowerment. Providing personal training to individuals in various fields of expertise might significantly help them to be more competitive on the labour market and thereby improve their earning opportunities. Individual support provided by mentors helps to adjust the training to the individual’s needs which in turn leads to higher chances of “power within” and “power to” enhancement.

On the other hand, the absence of working positions in the residence area of targeted group might be huge limitation in empowering Romani women economically. Moreover, there are many other factors that have to be taken into account when accessing economic opportunities of Romani women such as a need to take care family, distance from the working place, and others

Macro level: Collect evidence and advocate

In order to work on issues such as potential discrimination in hiring policies, macro-level policy steps should complement local initiatives. In order to guarantee effective economic empowerment of targeted women, challenges should be tackled by additional policy actions such as joint action of RIO-trained Romani leaders. In order to do this, concrete data is needed on the challenges Roma women face in seeking or retaining employment in order to 1) determine if, and what type of policy intervention is appropriate and 2) provide Romani leaders and activists with evidence with which to make their case.

Build participant ownership

The project Roma Mothers’ Empowerment Centers (MECs) represents the nice example of achieving economic empowerment in a very effective way. Selecting Romani mothers as a target group, a spill-over effect to other family members might be easily present because mothers are in charge of a household and the well-being of its members. Hence, by enhancing Romani mother’s access to public services and other community activities through establishment of self-help clubs, the economic situation of entire Roma families might significantly improve. Thereby **power to** and **power with** aspects of empowerment can progress. Moreover, as the MECs are established in under-served rural locations, **power within** is promoted as well. Given these positive elements of the project, it can be seems that it has substantial potential for empowering Roma communities in a broader sense.

Yet the crucial condition for success is the active approaching of targeted mothers and the recognition inside their communities. If MECs would be seen as something artificial and implemented from “above”, positive spill-over effects and whole idea of self-help clubs might be endangered. Therefore, the emphasis should be put on “indigenous” action by providing favorable conditions for self-empowerment and cooperation among mothers involved. Additionally, measures must be taken to ensure that Romani mothers involved in the MECs are self-organized and driving their own empowerment.

General conclusions: Supporting empowerment initiatives

Interlocking empowerment

The four types of empowerment analyzed (political, legal, educational and economic) are often interlocking, and even hierarchical. A basic level of economic empowerment was shown to be vital to successful programs in the other three areas, wherein participation in programs, events and opportunities yielded opportunity costs for participating households. Both political and legal frameworks were shown to be under-utilized without a strong educational component. Finally, where programs had specifically built employment opportunities into their activities, educational empowerment could be, at times, translated into economic empowerment, as in the case of “My Dream” (Colorful Pearls Association).

Empowerment: catching the “slippery fish”

Of the indicators used by organizations to track “empowerment” in their beneficiaries, few of those surveyed actually focused on participants’ experience or feelings of their own empowerment. Overwhelmingly, external, quantitative indicators (e.g. number of participants, hours of instruction) were used to measure program “success.” Additional quantitative or qualitative indicators measuring participant beliefs or actions relating to their own empowerment would complement these existing, output-driven indicators, and may give a more complete picture of program impact.

“Empowerment,” as a long-term process with few visible outputs, is particularly difficult to capture in concrete indicators. However, having a clear vision of the targeted dimension of empowerment from the beginning can guide this process. For example, a program fostering

power with (which measures how gaining power strengthens the power of others⁷⁰) would need to capture behavior change not only in the project's target group, but in those associated with them. On such example is that of Ovidiu Ro's conditional cash transfer program (Every Child in Preschool), wherein measuring attendance rates not only of participating students, but of their non-participant classmates revealed that—in 2 of the 19 communities involved—high attendance on the part of OvR students was coupled with higher attendance rates in students from the same school building who were not receiving any additional incentive or support to attend school⁷¹. Qualitative measures (for OvR participants and non-participants) could aid in capturing the impetus behind these changes in attendance level, and paint a clearer picture of whether **power with** had played a role.

Data as key to progress

Finally, although “empowerment” is difficult to capture, rigorous data collection still occupies a central role in programming, even if this data is not used to judge the “success” or “failure” of a project. Although not all of the programs analyzed had advocacy components or aimed to publish their results, the majority of funders named integrating evidence from current programs into their future ones as essential. In cases where substantial demographic data was collected or discovered, this information could aid not only the funder, but governments, donors, and program managers working in the field.

This is particularly relevant for RIO in its work with Romani individuals and women who may not be in the formal workforce—two groups for which RIO, itself, has pointed out that hard data can be extremely scarce⁷². Without this data, building current and future (empowerment) initiatives can leave program managers struggling to track whether gains have been made over time. As such, thoughtful collection, analysis and dissemination of relevant data collected through the grant-making process could aid RIO in empowering not only project participants, but those working in the field of Roma initiatives.

⁷⁰ Rowland (1997), as cited in Cecilia Luttrell and Sitna Quiroz, with Claire Scrutton and Kate Bird, “Understanding and operationalizing empowerment”, Overseas Development Institute, Working Paper 308, November 2009, available at www.odi.org.uk.

⁷¹ <http://www.ovid.ro/en/rezultate/martie-2011-midterm-report/>

⁷² McDonald, C. and Negrin, K. (2010). “No Data, No Progress: Country Findings.” *Open Society Foundations – Roma Initiatives*. Open Society Institute: New York and Budapest. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/sites/default/files/no-data-no-progress-20100628.pdf>