

Power Analysis – Programme Practice

This guide for Christian Aid staff and partners explains what power is, why it is important, how and when to implement power analysis, and which tools to use. It is relevant to all types of our work, and is supported by separate guides to the tools and processes identified.

Partnership for change – just power relations

Christian Aid’s overall goal is for all women and men to have the **power to end poverty**: to become empowered and active, individually and collectively, in changing and challenging the forces, people, structures and systems that dominate their lives.¹ Lack of power is a form of poverty: poverty is structural (related to the way that our societies and economies are designed and governed) and driven by an unjust and unequal distribution of power.

Equal and just power relations create conditions in which women and men, girls and boys, share fully in life’s decisions, in society and in the economy. An individual’s identities (race, ethnicity, caste, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, etc) can have a profound effect on how they are able to exercise their rights and power.

Power and politics are closely connected, and development work is essentially political in nature.² Overcoming inequality and poverty is often less about technical solutions than understanding and working with the political dynamics between people and institutions.

What is power?

Power can be understood as the **ability to create or resist change** seen in individuals and groups (‘agency’ that can be less visible) and institutions (‘structures’ and context that are more settled and define the rules of the game). Understanding how power changes hands, shifts and is built is key to understanding how social and economic change happens. A gender-oriented understanding of power relations is essential to bringing about an equal society. All groups in society have varying senses of their own power, tied up with understandings of rights, entitlements, behaviours and unwritten rules, and the structural and systemic inclusion or exclusion and inequality that characterises their community.

Table 1. Quick guide to power

Forms of power	<p>Power over</p> <p>Power to</p> <p>Power with</p> <p>Power within</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domination/negative exercise of power, exploiting and repressing others, controlling resources and spaces of power.³ • Ability to decide and carry out actions, to resist or create. • Ability to act collectively, through solidarity or joint action. • Personal dignity and self-worth often linked to culture and religion, which influence thoughts and actions that appear legitimate.
Faces of power	<p>Visible</p> <p>Hidden</p> <p>Invisible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power is shown through observable/tangible decision-making mechanisms and forums. • Power that forms or influences the political agenda behind the scenes, deliberately kept out of sight. • Power based on social or cultural beliefs, socialisation, ideology, and religious beliefs that sets rules and norms.
Types of power (a person may hold)	<p>Knowledge power</p> <p>Resource power</p> <p>Personal power</p> <p>Positional power</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding rights and entitlements, responsibilities and obligations, and the actions needed to attain them. • Access to, and influence over, resources, services and means of production. • Self-esteem, a personal motivation to claim resources. • Ability to negotiate and claim rights and entitlements, fulfil responsibilities and obligations, ensure equality in outcomes.
Spaces	<p>Closed</p> <p>Invited</p> <p>Claimed/created</p> <p>Open</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In private, no access, no entitlement. • Some people are permitted to participate or observe. • Excluded people create or claim their own space to make decisions. • Accessible to all, inclusive, representative.
Domain	<p>Public</p> <p>Private</p> <p>Intimate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In public life and open to all. • Agreed among the group to be out of public view. • Close relationships (family, spouse, friends etc).

Power is **complex and dynamic**: it is constantly changing as different individuals, groups or institutions compete to gain or retain control, or resist others' control over resources (material, human, intellectual and financial). The degree of control over resources becomes a source of individual and collective power. The most widely accepted approaches to categorise and define power are summarised in table 1 on page 1.

Why is it important to understand power?

To end poverty, we need to understand how **power is created, sustained or resisted in a given context**.

This helps us to understand what **structures we need to change** to achieve fairness and justice in the power relations that define our lives.

If we make this effort, it can help us better understand the context in which we are working, help us see and

seize opportunities for change, and ultimately **create deeper and more lasting change**.

If we do not understand power in our work, we risk it being less effective, not addressing the root causes of poverty and even doing harm. We also risk exacerbating power imbalances driven by gender, class, ethnicity, caste, age, disability, sexuality and other identities.

What is power analysis?

Power analysis is a participatory process that involves people with a stake in a particular situation to analyse how power relations affect it and might be changed for the better. It uses a structured approach and aims to understand the reality for those stakeholders.⁴ It is not a one-off process, but should be returned to, challenged and reassessed. It applies to ALL of Christian Aid's work regardless of sector.

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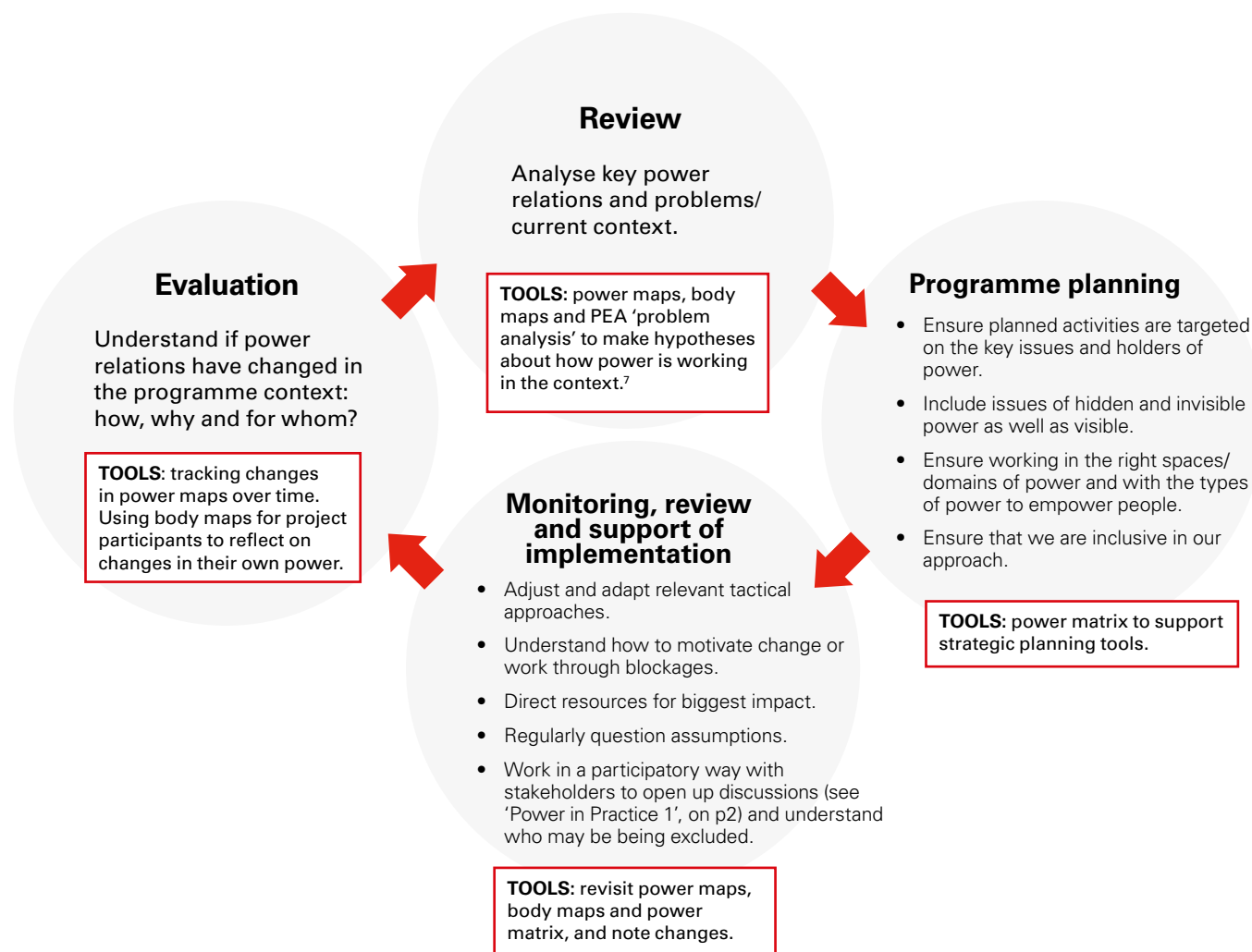
Table 2. Why might we use power analysis?	What it can mean for our work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the forms of power that reinforce poverty and inequality, and identify positive kinds of power that can be mobilised to tackle these issues. • To deepen contextual understanding beyond a simple context or situation analysis. Also useful for consideration of wider political economy analysis (PEA).⁵ • To ensure power imbalances between women and men are always considered and redressed by closely analysing underlying structures and dynamics.⁶ • To review and revise programme strategies and theories of change. • To help Christian Aid and its partners to become aware of, and develop strategies to address, unequal power dynamics in the way we work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures programmes address the root causes of poverty and inequality, identify politically smart interventions in strategic planning and design. • Helps to identify tactical approaches to prevent programmes being blocked, thrown off-course or coopted by powerful interests. • Moves us past fixed assumptions of power (eg, women are powerless to change anything in a male-dominated society). • Questions assumptions and opens up possibilities for actors to reposition themselves, to create or enter new spaces, or to imagine and develop new ways of working. • Encourages us to review the power in our own personal and professional relationships, eg power between Christian Aid, our partners and the communities with whom we work.

Power in practice 1: Power and gender

In Sierra Leone, our partner SEND brought together traditional male leaders and women's groups to carry out a joint analysis of who held power in their communities, along with the risks and benefits. It was used to support women's candidature in local elections by persuading traditional male leaders to

back female candidates publicly. Understanding the impact of the power relations relevant to them and the way in which they could be a force for positive change brought male leaders onside and allowed rapid progress in encouraging more women to stand.

Step 1: decide when to use power analysis in the programme cycle



Step 2: select your tools, focus and methodology

There is no rigid framework to follow when conducting power analysis. Each context, programme, organisation and situation is unique and tools should be adapted to fit the context and the problem being addressed. Power analysis is relevant for ALL Christian Aid programmes:

•**Governance and health/essential services:** power analysis can be applied to work in governance and access to health and essential services. For example, in Kenya power mapping has been used in governance programmes focused on exclusion and rights, but also applied to health governance and unequal social norms (see 'Power in practice 2' on page 4).

•**Resilience/livelihoods-markets:** a power analysis approach is embedded in the thinking behind some of key tools, such as participatory vulnerability and capacity assessments (PVCA)⁸ and BRAPA-BRACED participatory approach⁹ in resilience programming, and participatory

markets systems development (PMSD)¹⁰ analysis in markets/livelihoods work.

•**Gender/conflict/humanitarian:** power and gender should always be considered together as part of a wider gender analysis. There are strong correlations with conflict analysis, and increasingly humanitarian programmes are analysing power relations in planning and evaluating their response.

•**Policy/advocacy:** work in country programmes uses power analysis to identify targets and key actors to influence, but is also used to link policy and advocacy activities with broader community demand and citizen voice programmes. For example, Nigeria's Voice to the People (V2P) programme links up community charters of demand, local service monitoring and state-level budget and policy scrutiny. Power analysis helps identify champions of change who can support the use of this evidence to lobby the government to deliver change.

We have identified three **simple tools**¹¹ that have been used successfully and can be integrated into programme analysis, design and review processes as noted above. Please seek help and advice where necessary to access complementary tools, for example on gender- and conflict-sensitive programming.¹²

The tools can be adapted to context, and help to emphasise different aspects of analysing and working with power. All can be used at analysis, design, planning, review and evaluation stages: they are designed to be participatory and inclusive ways to reflect on what is happening. How these tools are used depends very much on the context and participants.

1. **Power mapping:**¹³ identifying the different stakeholders in a situation – understanding who has the power to change things, who influences who (and how), and beginning to identify targets for influence, things or people who are blocking change, and possible ways to work with them.
2. **Body mapping:**¹⁴ a way of looking at key individuals to explore and analyse the knowledge, personal, positional and resource power they may have, or need, to make change happen.
3. **Power matrix:**¹⁵ a way of taking your analysis of who is holding power and thinking about the most strategic actions to take in that context. A simplified example is shown in table 3 on page 5.

A power matrix helps the country programme team to analyse, dissect and strategically develop possible responses to the problems based on power mapping done and/or body-mapping exercises – additional columns may be added to build up a richer picture.

This matrix then provides staff and partners with the basis for developing a theory of change and then a strategic plan to bring about that change.

Power in practice 2: understanding who holds power in essential services

In Kenya, following a new constitution coming into law, budgeting power was decentralised to county level. The country team and partners used power analysis (and committed to reviewing it on a regular basis) to understand how excluded communities could influence local government planning processes to improve resilience and access to essential services. They asked: 'What are the opportunities and who really holds power? How can we ensure excluded men and women are heard?'

'We have found that gender roles are a major factor in determining which segments of communities engage in problem analysis, project design, implementation and review... Due to power relations, sometimes only the powerful attend meetings and community mobilisation needs to be more strategic and intentional'

John Kitui, Kenya Country Manager

Power in practice 3: women's participation in decision-making

In Nigeria, Voice to the People (V2P)¹⁶ aims to increase women's involvement and decision making in community-level governance structures. Power analysis has supported strategies to transform 'power over' into 'power with, power to and power within': the collective ability to confront, engage and negotiate, and to support individual and community empowerment. Table 3 on page 5 summarises V2P's power matrix.

Step 3: theory of change development and strategic planning

1. Query **causal links and underlying assumptions** between stages of your theory of change – are these really true or happening in practice, and why? Use power analysis to **rank and detail risks** as you develop strategies to tackle hidden power and deeply entrenched vested interests. Power analysis highlights and includes both risks and incentives.
2. **Develop a strategy to respond to the power analysis and return to it.** This might be reflected in your theory of change, your programme strategy and your projects' results frameworks. **A programme strategy or theory of change should not remain static. It should be refined and revised as external and internal contexts and your understanding of them change.** Use power analysis to **question the assumptions** – regularly revise and update as you review and refine your strategic focus throughout the programme.

Table 3: V2P power matrix – increasing women’s participation in local governance

Actors	Problem/power analysis	Responses and strategies	Building collective power
Visible power: shown through observable/tangible decision-making mechanisms and forums			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President General • Traditional ruler (Igwe) and cabinet • Village heads • District councillor • Policies, laws (formal and traditional) • Budgets • Men-only meetings • Civil society organisations (CSOs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tradition of not challenging male authority especially for women. • Male domination of political power and leadership. • Gender-biased policies and laws. • Decision-making in exclusive groups and meetings that are only open to male elites. • No complaints procedure, recourse, scrutiny or mechanisms of engagement with the government. • CSOs reinforce the exclusion in their organisational behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s empowerment and gender sensitisation (and men involved in it) through gender empowerment (GEADOR) circles to change traditional view (power with and within). • Capacity building and mentoring for women leaders (power within and to). • CSO networks support collective action (power with). • Media and social media make very visible connections between leaders and women (power with, within and to). • Participation in town hall unions negotiated collectively (power to). • Igwe influenced by advisers to involve women and supports women to participate (power with and to). 	
Hidden power: this forms or influences the political agenda behind the scenes, and excludes and discriminates			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Umuadas (wise women) groups • Secret societies • Vested interests of men (leaders) • Igwe, village council, town hall union • Igwe’s wife and close associates • Media: radio, newspapers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Umuadas exercise hidden but significant influence over individuals and the Igwe. • Women (potential) leaders labelled trouble-makers or unrepresentative by men. • Secret societies make key decisions behind closed doors (closed spaces). • Women’s issues: seen as private, individual, not worthy of public action. • Media misrepresents or misinforms or ignores women’s issues. • Igwe’s wife and close associates influence agenda in private (intimate domain). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positively influencing informal umuadas (private spaces for women/power with). • Collective representation by women (power with). • Participatory community research and dissemination of information, ideas and images that validate women’s issues (knowledge power). • Use of alternative media outlets, social media and radio to expose true agendas (knowledge power/public domain). • Build relationships with Igwe’s wife and associates or find a bridging relationship of trust and confidence to utilise her strong influence on Igwe (intimate domain). • Women’s participation in cabinet influences Igwe’s decision-making (power to/claimed space). 	Confronting, engaging, negotiating
Invisible power: shaping meaning, values and what is ‘normal’			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwritten rules of social behaviour and social norms • Cultural norms and values, dominant ideologies, eg, religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inequality and discrimination in representation: lack of women, especially young, in key positions. • Women are kept ‘in their place’ through cultural practices that protect male dominance. • Ideologies, such as church doctrine or religious beliefs that reinforce women’s place as ‘in the home’. • Lack of information and knowledge that inhibits women’s ability to question, resist and posit alternative policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media messages awareness and knowledge of rights: radio-listening clubs, Facebook groups (knowledge power, power to, power within, power with). • CSOs and education programmes to work with key influential male leaders to overcome stigma or cultural barriers (knowledge power). • GEADOR circle as a forum for open discussion, learning and sharing stories (knowledge power, power within). • Religious leaders positively present benefits of women participating (power within, positive power over). 	Individual/collective power

Final things to consider when thinking about power in programmes

Pick your timing. This may be in the planning stage for a new piece of work, when the external context shifts (eg, an election or humanitarian emergency) or when you are not seeing expected results. Do some analysis when you plan and to return to it often as the project and context develops.

Define a clear purpose. Establish who should be involved (consider the balance of women and men, and think about other inclusion factors) and ensure their meaningful participation (do you need to prepare individuals separately?); what you want to look at and need to know; core issues or questions; the actors and relationships to understand; the relevant forms of power, the relationships and power structures. The clearer your focus, the more effective the power analysis will be.

Define scope. Your procedure or format will depend on your context and needs. Power analysis must consider the competition for power among elites and political actors, but also how power operates through society, including inside men and women's minds, and how that shapes their understanding of what is possible. Consider your own power as an individual and as the organisation you work for.

Review existing power analysis. Assess any gaps in knowledge about power in your area of focus. In many programmes, complex, unexpected and dynamic changes occur. When these happen, assess how far the dynamics of change were specific to that moment/issue or whether general lessons can be derived.

Identify appropriate tools. Power analysis can be used in formats and tools that you may already be familiar

with to plan, monitor and evaluate your work. Consider workshops, key informant interviews and focus groups to include diverse voices and perspectives, both from within the programme and externally. Individuals/groups may experience power differently from one moment or place to another. Where does your evidence come from, does it triangulate with other sources, and is it inclusive?

Consider and reflect on your own power and how this works with partners and the communities that they work with. Access to resources and knowledge creates power imbalances – what can you do to be aware of these and empower others?

Understanding power is instinctive: We all feel, see and instinctively react to power. Power analysis is about trying to bring out the less visible aspects of this in a more planned and explicit way. What is most important is not using the 'right language' or the diagrams we draw, but how we act to challenge unequal distribution of power in the world.

Power in practice 4: collective power to address shared risks

PARC, one of our partners in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, used its PVCA process to bring together representatives from a number of communities to look at the shared risks they all faced. This helped to build 'power with' between communities that had acted separately beforehand. Critically, the analysis of who held power that could be influenced (local government and NGOs) by those communities meant that they targeted their advocacy more effectively and got good results in a very unstable wider environment.

Endnotes

1. Partnership for Change, christianaid.org.uk/Images/2012_strategy.pdf
2. Brendan Halloran, *Thinking and Working Politically in the Transparency and Accountability Field*, May 2014, transparency-initiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Thinking-and-Working-Politically.May-2014.pdf
3. Note: for discussion and consideration according to context. Sometimes 'power over' can be positive, eg when a state uses its authority for the public good or for poverty reduction.
4. The body mapping tool, which uses areas of the body as visual cues to map out the types of power and where that power comes from in a given individual. See christianaid.org.uk/resources/policy/programme-practice.aspx
5. To find out more about the PEA problem-driven approach, visit gsdrc.org/docs/open/pea.pdf or odi.org/programmes/politics-governance/applied-political-economy-analysis
6. Christian Aid, *Gender Justice for All*, 2014, christianaid.org.uk/Images/Reports-Gender-Strategy-July2014-J2623_tcm15-78960.pdf
7. See 'Political Economy and Power Analysis Guide' at christianaid.org.uk/resources/policy/programme-practice.aspx
8. See PVCA guide available at christianaid.org.uk/resources/policy/programme-practice.aspx
9. Adaptation of PVCA tools to take account of climate shocks.
10. See PMSD guide at christianaid.org.uk/resources/policy/programme-practice.aspx
11. See 'Power Analysis Tools and Resources' on Sharepoint, including all the tools (some in French and Spanish), training guides, introduction to power analysis and links to external resources.
12. Charles Gay, Power and Governance Adviser, Programme Performance and Learning Team, cgay@christian-aid.org
13. See *Power Mapping Tool* guide available at christianaid.org.uk/resources/policy/programme-practice.aspx.
14. See note 4, above.
15. See *Power Matrix* guide at christianaid.org.uk/resources/policy/programme-practice.aspx
16. voicetothepeople.org

Christian Aid is a Christian organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

We work globally for profound change that eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality. We are part of a wider movement for social justice.

We provide urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes.

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