

Loaded word

Sociology, Empowerment



Among the words that were created and developed in the English language, “empowerment” remains an elusive yet most rampantly used term, especially in the field of civic engagement and community-building.

Empowerment is a word that contains with it social, political, and economic dimensions; however, its foci remains on the political dimension, wherein the objective is to experience or provide power to an individual or group.

According to the World Bank, empowerment “is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.” These capacities are social and/or economic in nature, and they are gained and developed through the utilization of resources available in people’s social environments. Key to the achievement of empowerment is access to these resources, since it is only by the availability of these resources that individuals or groups are able to achieve development of their capacities.

Empowerment is a loaded word because this concept is difficult to achieve, especially when social and economic factors are included in the achievement of empowerment. This is the dilemma encountered among individuals or groups who try to achieve empowerment, as ascertained in their own terms. Because empowerment could mean the achievement of capacities on the different aspects of a person’s life, empowerment is also subjected to varied interpretations of its success or failure.

In fact, empowerment could also have positive and negative dimensions. Positive empowerment is achieved when the individual/group feels empowered without letting other people feel subjugated; the converse is the

effect of negative empowerment, wherein the individual/group feels empowered at the expense of another individual/group.

Empowerment is reflected in the work of millionaire Bill Gates, who feels empowerment because of the economic resources that he has at his disposal and control. These economic resources are the computer and information technologies, intellectual, and financial resources.

His empowerment is reflected in his ability to command his IT company Microsoft, to live comfortably and not feel the scarcity of resources about him, and to provide support to other people who needs empowerment in different areas in their lives. He is an individual who experienced empowerment because of his intellect, and through his intellect, he was able to capacitate himself further by accumulating economic wealth and the ability to be a “ mover” in the industry of computer and information technologies.

People who have not yet experienced empowerment in terms of development are the Papuans, of the Pacific Island Papua New Guinea. Papuans are considered not empowered when it comes to their health, wherein there are still individuals and groups who experience health affliction such as tuberculosis (TB) and malaria. In TB alone, Papuans remain far behind versus other developing and underdeveloped countries.

This is why, in order to promote health empowerment among Papuans, funding agencies are supporting them in terms of economic resources, such as providing supplies of medicines and laboratory equipment to the health

sector of the country. In addition to providing economic resources, agencies are also providing capacity-building support to the village members, empowering them by providing them knowledge and skills in detecting TB patients and the treatment services available in their villages. By controlling and preventing this disease alone, Papuans are empowered in a particular aspect of their lives: healthcare, particularly TB care and treatment.