

A Two Way Street.

Empowerment defined through the Perspective of Youth at Uweza Foundation

Kibera, Kenya



**Universiteit Utrecht**

**Dana Alajaji**

**MSc Youth, Education and Society**

**Pedagogy and International Development**

UU Student Number: 6387748

UU Supervisor: dr. Saskia Van Schaik

UU Secondary Supervisor: prof. Mariëtte de Haan

Word Count: 7200

### **Abstract**

Empowerment has become a buzzword in the international development community, but has yet to be universally defined. This research aims to shed light on how participants at a non-governmental organization in the Kibera district in Nairobi, Kenya define empowerment and what they perceive as its critical elements to be empowered. In seven focus groups, the definition of empowerment and drawings about empowerment were discussed among 54 participants. Results show that participants mostly define empowerment as a process of development, actualisation of goals and not as a process of becoming critical. In the focus group discussions about the drawings, several aspects of empowerment were discussed, participants mainly highlighted their gains in resources, connection to the NGO, talent development, community impact, change in occupation and mental impact. These findings shed new insight to the meaning of empowerment in the Kibera district in Kenya. Furthermore, it offers a critical view on defining empowerment. This research offers insights from those experiencing “empowerment”. It can inform researchers, policy makers, and anyone concerned with empowerment on inclusive ways to understand how to approach development.

## Introduction

The concept of empowerment has been a particular interest to researchers and practitioners since the 1970s (Simon, 1994; Calves, 2009). This interest was sparked by the wide scope of content areas to which empowerment theory can be applied (Hinnant, 2001). Empowerment is a construct that shares many disciplines and arenas, including: community development, psychology, education, economics as well as social movements and organizations (Page and Czuba, 1999). In recent years, the widespread use of the term has given it a reputation for becoming ‘mainstream’ and a ‘buzzword’ in the rhetoric of international development (Kabeer, 2001). However, despite the popularity, the term lacks a clarified definition in this field (Hennink, Kiiti, Pillinger & Jayakaran, 2012). The difficulty to define empowerment in research has been recognized by many academics. Rappaport (1984) contests that empowerment is difficult to define in action as it takes on different forms for different people and contexts. This is evidenced by the wide range of terminology, conceptualization and meanings used to frame and understand empowerment in development literature (Hui, Au & Fock, 2003). Koggel (2010) argues that empowerment is too often used synonymously with agency claiming that the term loses meaning when it is thought through a perspective of enhancing individual agency. She identifies a distinction between them contesting that empowerment focuses on individuals as relational and interdependent and further acknowledges the instructional structure of empowerment and the importance of responding to the needs of others (Koggel, 2010).

Theories of empowerment include both processes and outcomes, where an individual’s actions and activity of engagement may lead to an empowering or disempowering result (Swift and Levin, 1987). Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) claim that in order to clearly define empowerment theory, a distinction between the processes and outcomes is critical.

**Empowering Processes.** The processes of empowerment can range dependent upon what is being done to get to the empowerment outcome. Zimmerman describes the processes as “a series of experiences in which individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them” (1995, pg 583.) In the World Bank Sourcebook on Empowerment, Narayan (2002) describes the processes as increasing poor people’s assets and

capabilities for them to ‘participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions to affect their lives’. Chambers (1993) highlights that the process is aimed at poverty reduction by asserting ownership of productive assets for a better livelihood. Much previous research suggests an approach to poverty reduction that builds on resources, assets, capabilities and opportunities of individuals and communities (Sen, 1999).

According to Zimmerman, empowerment can be viewed on three levels: individual, organizational and community (1995). An empowering process on an individual level could include participation in an organization, whereas at the organizational level it could include collective decision making and shared leadership. On a community level, empowering processes could include government participation or access to community resources (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). Kelly claims that when professionals work towards empowering outcomes, the processes include involving community members in the participation of the development, implementation and evaluation of empowering interventions as well as creating opportunities for community members to develop skills in order to gain independence from the professional assistance (Kelly, 1971 pg 899). Furthermore, Maton (2008) contests that the process of empowerment is expected to take place over an extended period of time for marginalized or oppressed individuals. Several scholars have claimed that participatory action research is an approach towards exemplifying empowering processes (Rappaport, 1990; Yeich and Levine, 1992; Zimmerman, 1995). One of the goals of participatory action research is said to develop the knowledge necessary to influence relevant policy and improve quality of life (Zimmerman, 1995). This approach aims to provide an opportunity for community members to solve problems by developing skills, creating mutual support systems and becoming critically aware of the sociopolitical environment (Zimmerman, 1995).

**Empowering Outcomes.** The outcomes of empowerment refer to the specific measurements, either qualitative or quantitative, that are used to study the effects of interventions that are designed to empower participants (Zimmerman, 1995). Outcomes for individuals can include situation-specific perceived control and resource mobilization skills (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). One of the largest contested issues surrounding empowerment outcomes is the development of locally relevant measures (Zimmerman, 1995). How these measures are

developed are debated within the literature. Hennink et al. (2012) argue that there is little empirical research to understand how those at the centre of development practice define and implement programs that promote empowerment, contesting that theoretical frameworks of empowerment do not offer a substantive evidence base. They claim that understanding individual change can inform community empowerment strategies and policies (Hennink et al., 2012). Essentially, the outcomes of empowerment involve what is accomplished by the process, or the empowering intervention. Taylor (2000) warns that measuring someone else's empowerment could be potentially disempowering and contests that it should not become something the more powerful do to the less powerful (Taylor, 2000). Furthermore, scholars insist that empowerment should be measured using a qualitative approach in order to capture significant details and experiences. Rappaport (1981) states that collaborative models and communal narratives could be analyzed on multiple levels in order to advance our understanding of the processes of social and personal development. These levels often include measuring empowerment on an individual or community level. Zimmerman claims that conceptualizing psychological empowerment is fundamental to understanding other levels of analysis of which the individual is influenced by (1995).

**Empowering Measures.** A nomological network to measure psychological empowerment was created by Zimmerman (1995). It is an open-ended construct that may change over time and is dependent upon the context in which it is measured. The model includes three components, an intrapersonal component, interactional component and a behavioural component. The intrapersonal component refers to how people think about themselves, including their domain-specific control, self-efficacy, motivation to take control and their perceived competence (Zimmerman, 1995). The interactional component refers to the understanding people have about their community and relative sociopolitical issues in their environment. This includes having a critical awareness, which refers to the resources that are required to achieve a desired goal, the knowledge of how to acquire such resources and the skills for managing the resources. It is said that in order for people to exert control in their environment, they must learn about their options in a given context (Zimmerman, 1995). In short, these components merge to symbolize an individual who believes they have the capability to influence a context, the understanding of how

the system works within that context and the behaviours to allow them to exert control within the specific context (Zimmerman, 1995). In regard to his nomological network of psychological empowerment, Zimmerman states that measuring empowerment in a specific setting for a particular sample of individuals is possible as long as it is contextually grounded in participants life experiences and is connected to their experiences as they state them (Zimmerman, 1995).

This recommendation is in line with using participatory action research as mentioned as a process of empowerment. Jupp, Ibn Ali and Barahona (2010) pioneered a participatory research method published by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) that gathers indicators of empowerment that can be measured from the perspective of participants in a social movement. The framework requires participants to depict their lives before joining a social movement, their current situation and their vision for the near future. The pioneers contest that the approach selected must be “culturally appropriate and unlock spontaneity and free thinking” (Jupp et al., 2010, pg. 89). An example of an approach for this method is drawing, which has long been used by researchers to explore conscious and unconscious issues and experiences (Theron et al., 2011). Within development contexts, the availability and opportunity to access therapy is limited, therefore a technique like drawing is said to engage participants in therapeutic processes that can make parts of the self and/or levels of development visible (Theron et al., 2011).

Furthermore, by applying Zimmerman's nomological model on psychological empowerment and collecting data using participatory research methods, this research can show how existing theoretical frameworks can apply to context-specific findings on empowerment as well as how they may not apply to a specific context. Furthermore, when research is applied to theoretical models, they can highlight whether certain models are substantive enough to be applied to interventions in practice and gain context-specific relevant measures.

### **Empowerment: International Development and Non Governmental Organizations**

Empowerment entered agenda of development through a framework of gender and was primarily focused on women (Calvès, 2009). However, since the 1980s, the term has become central to the work of many development organisations (Luttrell and Quiroz, 2007) targeting wider audiences. It became recognized as one of the three pillars of poverty reduction by the

World Bank, and is embraced as a term by numerous organizations including the United Nations Development Program, Swedish International Development Agency, Oxfam and Save the Children to name a few (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005). The World Bank published a sourcebook on empowerment claiming that empowerment “is not a stand-alone strategy but a way of doing development, grounded in the conviction that poor people themselves are the most invaluable partners in the task of poverty reduction” (Narayan, page 46, 2012). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often utilize the term within the wide range of arenas it can be applied to: “Economic Youth Empowerment Program”, “Women’s Empowerment Initiative”, “Community Empowerment Program”, to name a few examples. Although it retains a prominent place in development policies, it appears in mainstream policy discourses in a diluted form (Rowlands, 1997). This dilution neutralizes the original emphasis of building personal and collective power for a more equitable society (Rowlands, 1997). The outcomes of empowerment are related to an improvement in an individual's life but the forms of improvement are not clarified. Scholars have argued that the lack of clarity towards the definition of empowerment risks undermining the value of efforts aimed at strengthening empowerment as a route towards ‘improving community development and poverty reduction’ (Hennink et al., page 204, 2002). Zimmerman (1984) has contested that asserting a single definition of empowerment may achieve it to become formulaic or prescription-like, which contradicts the very concept itself. According to Bailey (1992), how empowerment is defined within specific projects and programs should depend upon the specific people and context involved. Cochran (1986) claims that people understand their own needs far better than anyone else and as a result should have the power both to define and act upon them. Moreover, it has been argued that it is inappropriate for outsiders to pre-determine people’s experience of empowerment (Jupp et al., 2010). Therefore, understanding empowerment within the context of where the action of empowerment is taking place by focusing research on the perspective of those who are aimed to be empowered can offer a more fulfilled scope of the components of empowerment.

### **Kibera, Kenya**

NGOs have been initiating and funding important programs and projects in water, health, agriculture and education among other sectors since the 1920s in Kenya (Amutabi, 2006). They

are active in the leading sectors of development in Kenya by either supplementing or complementing governmental development programs. Their scope, diversity and activities permeate regional and national boundaries in the quest to address the problems of the poor that incorporate empowerment as a key approach (Amutabi, 2006).

What started as a squatter community during colonial times, Kibera has become known as the largest slum in Africa (Farrell, 2015). Literature concerning Kibera usually terms it as an ‘informal settlement’. Residents of Kibera refer to it as a slum, ghetto or *kijiji*, the Swahili word for village (Farrell, 2015). City authorities do not consider Nairobi’s informal settlements to be legal and basic service provision in these areas is unavailable (Wegelin-Schuringa & Kodo, 1997). Roughly 20% of Kiberan households have electricity and most houses are built using mud walls and corrugated tin roofs (African Population and Health Research Centre, 2014). Two water pipelines have been installed from the municipal council and the World Bank and although scarce, there are increasingly available toilet facilities. Nearly 50% of the population are employed, mostly in unskilled jobs; due to lack of occupation, drug use and criminal activity is common (African Population and Health Research Centre, 2014).

As Kibera continues to grow in size, the saturation of NGOs within the community also continues to increase (Farrell, 2015). In the year 2000 there were over 200 NGOs present in Kibera (Barcott, 2000). That number is assumed to have risen since then, and the impact of NGOs in Kibera have come under question in the media in recent years.

### **Current Study**

This research was conducted with Uweza Foundation, a community-led organization located in the Kibera district of Nairobi, Kenya. Uweza Foundation identifies their programs as empowering and provides 300 Kenyan children and youth with opportunities to better their lives through discovery of various talents and abilities (Uweza Foundation, [uwezakenya.org](http://uwezakenya.org), 2019). Their programs include providing youth with scholarships to attend highschool and university, a soccer program, an art program where artists are given resources to paint and sell for the Uweza Art Gallery gaining financial commissions and a Bright Futures program for women who are provided with loans for their businesses or skill development. The saturation of NGOs in Kibera



and the recognized use of the word empowerment prompted the research questions for this study. The Executive Director of Uweza Foundation approached the researcher

Understanding both the conceptual definition as well as the elements that youth regard as part of the empowering process can strengthen initiatives that utilize empowerment as a mechanism towards development and refute the existing criticisms by adding clarification to the term (Hennink et al., 2002; Jupp and Ibn Ali, 2010). Therefore, the question this research seeks to answer is: *What do participants of Uweza Foundation define as empowerment and critical elements to be empowered?* Due to the nature of Uweza Foundations programs rooted in empowerment, it is a suitable organization to research how participants define empowerment and gain insights on the expected outcomes while enrolled in an ‘empowering’ program.

## Method

### Sample

In the current study, there was a total of 54 participants of which 57% were female. The ages of participants ranged between 15-35 years old (M age 20.4, SD=5.06). Participants were randomly selected by Uweza Foundation to participate in this study from four programs. There were 20 participants from the soccer players with an average age of 20. Eighteen of the participants were from the scholarship program with an average age of 16. Both the art program and Bright Futures program consisted of eight participants each, with average ages of 21 and 29 respectively. The four programs that the participants were associated with were categorized into three groups of empowerment: sport, education and talent and skills acquisition. The art program and Bright Futures program were merged for the analysis because of the similarities of their empowerment approaches. Therefore, 37% represent empowerment through sport, 33% through education and 30% through talent and skills acquisition.

### Procedure

All participants above the age of eighteen and a guardian of participants below the age of eighteen signed a consent form agreeing to record and utilize the data collected anonymously.

**Drawings.** The first phase of this research used drawings as a method to gather the critical elements of empowerment. The approach was inspired by the framework shared by SIDA,

depicting one's life before a social movement, their current situation and their future vision. It was stressed that the focus of the drawings was on the content and not the quality. Participants were invited to use any of the drawing materials provided. These included: drawing pencils, colouring pencils, coloured crayons, markers and oil pastels. The drawings took participants roughly one hour to complete. Once participants were finished their drawings, each participant explained the motivation behind their drawings. After each participant was done explaining, other participants in the group were welcomed to ask them questions.

**Semi-structured Focus Group Discussions.** In order to answer the research question of defining empowerment, participants were presented with the Swahili word for empowerment, '*uwezeshaji*' and were asked to translate it into English. This question was conducted afterward the drawing activity to prevent participants from using their joint definition within their drawings. Once participants had ran out of suggestions, the group were presented with the English word "empowerment" and were asked to explain what that word meant to them. Follow up questions were asked to raise a discussion between the group. Some of these questions included: 'When was the first time you heard of the word empowerment?', 'What does it take to be empowered?', 'Do you feel like you have experienced empowerment and how?'. Further questions were dependent upon the topics raised in each discussion group. There was a total of seven focus group discussions (FGDs) with a range of 5-10 participants per group. The drawings took up to one hour to complete, and discussions took from 30 minutes to one hour and a half.

**Survey.** To conclude the procedure, participants were given a survey to fill out consisting of background information of participant's age, gender, and education level as well as other information that could be useful for Uweza Foundation's database. Although participants could all speak English, some opted to speak Swahili. A translator was present throughout the procedure to ensure mutual comprehension.

**Pilot.** This research method was piloted with 9 participants to test how the activity would be understood and to provide an opportunity to revise the prompts for the study. These participants are external to the 54 participants in the current study sample. The participants discussed what they would change in the research activity and how they felt about the experience. Initially, participants were asked to do one drawing at a time, unaware that they would be drawing three

drawings in total. They all agreed that they would prefer to be given all three prompts (before, current situation, five years time) at once. The chance to ask questions after the explanation of the participants triptych was implemented into the methodology after the pilot testing.

Participants also stated that they wished to be asked more questions in the survey. All suggestions for further questions were added to the survey, although not all of the survey data was utilized in this research. These questions included: How many people do you live with? How many meals do you eat per day? Do you financially support yourself? Where does your income come from? How much is your rent? What challenges do you face in your life?

These questions indicate that participants in this pilot wanted to convey financial related matters to the researcher and the organization.

### **Data Analysis.**

Inductive and deductive themes were gathered to code the dataset. Zimmerman's psychological empowerment network consisting of three components including twelve themes was used to code the data. These included: (1) Intrapersonal component: self-efficacy, domain-specific perceived control, motivation control, perceived competences. (2) Interactional component : critical awareness, understanding causal agents, skill development, skill transfer across life domains, resource mobilization. (3) Behavioural component: community involvement, organizational participant and coping behaviours (Zimmerman, 1995).

Drawings were observed by the researcher and overlooked by two other MSc candidates from Utrecht University. Significant observations were quantified and discussed in the results section. Participants translations of 'uwezeshaji' were counted and a word frequency table was made manually. Findings from the focus group discussion on empowerment were discussed with quotation examples.

## **Results**

### **Critical Elements of Empowerment**

In order to answer the research question of the critical elements to be empowered, findings from the drawings and focus group discussions are discussed guided by the three

components of psychological empowerment: intrapersonal, interactional and behavioural (Zimmerman, 1995). 5 additional themes were found deductively totalling seventeen final codes.

Table 1 represents the codelist and number of counts and percentages of utterances across each group.

Table 1. Themes from Zimmerman's model & participant utterances.

Program		Soccer Players	Bright Futures	Artists	Scholarship Students				
No. of Participants		21	8	9	20				
Code	Component	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%		
Self-efficacy	Intrapersonal	2	3.39	2	3.77	7	9.59	9	9.28
Domain Specific Perceived Control		0		2	3.77	1	1.37	0	
Motivation Control		4	6.78	4	7.55	4	5.48	3	3.1
Perceived Competence		3	5.1	6	11.3	4	5.48	10	10.3
Critical awareness	Interactional	3	5.1	1	1.89	3	4.2	0	
Understanding causal agents		1	1.7	4	7.55	5	6.85	6	6.19
Skill development		5	8.47	6	11.3	6	8.22	3	3.1
Skill transfer		1	1.7	2	3.77	3	4.2	0	
Resource Mobilization		1	1.7	5	9.43	1	1.37	1	1.03
Community involvement	Behavioural	5	8.47	3	5.66	3	4.2	3	3.1

Organizational participation		5	8.47	4	7.55	3	4.2	10	10.3
Coping Behaviour		4	6.78	0		0		0	

Table 2. Additional themes outside of Zimmerman's model

Additional themes								
Code	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Setting target	6	10.17	4	7.55	10	13.7	14	14.4
Financial needs	2	3.39	3	5.66	10	13.7	12	12.4
Education	2	3.39	2	3.77	9	12.3	9	9.28
Lack of material resources	2	3.39	2	3.77	2	2.74	10	10.3
Lack of opportunity	4	6.78	3	5.66	2	2.74	7	7.22

This research found that several codes across all three components of psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995) overlapped within the transcriptions of the focus group discussions. Findings are discussed in reference to three components of psychological empowerment: intrapersonal, interactional and behavioural (Zimmerman, 1995).

**Intrapersonal Component.** This component refers to how individuals think about themselves and their capacity to influence a given context (Zimmerman, 1995). The notion of *self-efficacy* was coded under portraying low self-efficacy and high self-efficacy. Participants portraying low self-efficacy mentioned this when discussing their life before joining Uweza Foundation. Examples from the FGD include: “I did not know what to do” and “I was clueless”. An improvement in self-efficacy was highlighted when participants discussed their situation after joining Uweza Foundation. One of the scholarship students stated: “After I joined Uweza, everything started to become uniform. I could wear shoes and wear clothes that are not torn. I

can dress up and show myself to people.” 88% of participants from the scholarship group expressed positive emotions in their current situation through their drawings, annotating “hopeful with a good plan” and “happy”.

*Perceived competence* was mentioned across all groups in this research. This was mostly highlighted while participants explained the goals they would like to achieve in their future drawings. Participants also expressed perceived competence by outlining specific characteristics in order to achieve a goal. These included “working hard to achieve what you want” and “time management”. However no participant explicitly discussed their current ability to achieve their goal within the FGD.

*Motivation control* was mentioned across all programs, regarding their motivation to achieve a particular goal. Participants mentioned assisting family members financially, one scholarship student said “I want to help my parents pay for my siblings school fees”. A participant in the Bright Future’s program discussed her motivation to succeed in her profession as a teacher: “I want to have my own school, like a daycare and earn good money so I can employ people to assist me.” This participant mentioned the difficulty of earning enough income as a teacher and regularly being mispaid by employers.

An additional theme that fits as an intrapersonal component that was unique to the artist participants was the notion of *branding* yourself. Unlike other programs at Uweza Foundation, participants in the art program are competing with each other for commissions on their artwork. One participant stated “...you have to keep branding your name to be more successful in the future.” The topic of branding was discussed among all participants in this FGD.

**Interactional Component.** This component refers to participants interaction with Uweza Foundation and participants understanding of the community and socio political issues.

*Causal agents.* This refers to participants awareness of the influences in their community that enables them and disables them to do something. For example, scholarship students were aware that Uweza has granted them with the opportunity to attend a school. 61% of scholarship students reported being unable to attend school before Uweza supported them financially. All participants in the art group reported being able to nurture their talent in painting through access to resources from Uweza Foundation.

*Skill development.* Scholarship students in high-school refer to developing skills in relation to academic or career pursuits. Other groups discussed skill development in relation to what they are currently engaged in with Uweza Foundation. For example, art participants indicated aspirations to become an art teacher, open an art gallery or host their own art exhibition. 70% of participants in the soccer group expressed or drew aspirations to become professional soccer players. These participants were asked if they would feel the same way if a basketball program was available. They responded saying that they would also enjoy the opportunity to play basketball, however understood the question in terms of adding a basketball program to the organization and not in terms of developing a skill and having a future vision towards it. Women in the Bright Futures group discussed developing skills in terms of having the ability to expand their businesses. They claimed that they would like more guidance and assistance in terms of improving their business prospects after receiving loans. Although all of these examples imply a development in skills, they also indicate a need for resource mobilization.

*Resource mobilization* came up most in the FGD with the Bright Futures program participants. Only participants in the Bright Futures and artist groups discussed recommendations for the organization. These included monitoring new members in the program, learning more from each other and continued mentorship upon the grant of a loan. One participant stated “you can help us with how to run our business... advice... so at least when you are given a loan you will know what to do with it”. One of the participants in the artist group expressed that if given more resources they could be used to learn new skills from each other. An additional theme that was found relative to resource mobilization was the display of an *increase in resources*. This theme was identified across all participants in this study. Growth in resources are displayed in two sets. The first set are the resource gains from before to present, including access to schooling, shoes, better clothing, art equipment and equipment for participants’ business practices. The second set of resources were indicated in the ‘future’ drawings. The three most common material resource gains found in the ‘future’ set was owning a car, with 37% of participants indicating this. Secondly was the indication of an improvement in household with 26% of participants drawing a bigger house usually with bricks. One of the

participants in the Bright Futures group said “I want to have a good house. Now, I just have a single room house. I want a house where my kids can sleep here, I can sleep there and live a stress-free life”. Lastly, 9% of participants drew an aeroplane and stated their urge to travel. Of the female participants, 52% drew themselves in their drawings with indications of an improvement in appearance through hair styles, high heels and brighter coloured clothing.

Another theme that was found in this research was a *lack of opportunity*. This was found amongst participants in all groups. 15% of participants reported being unemployed before joining Uweza Foundation. In the FGD with the male soccer players, one participant drew theft as a result of unemployment. This was termed by participants as ‘*idleness*’. One participant claimed that theft was due to youth being too “lazy” to work in construction type jobs that typically pay \$4 per one day of labour. One male participant gave an example of his life before joining the organization of stealing, not because he may want “the phone” but because he wanted to be able to eat. Participants in the artist group discussed their lack of opportunity in regard to inaccessibility of art related resources and opportunity to be artistic at school. One of the participants said “I was using my maths book to draw cartoons, I was caned properly. Now, I found a place where I can practice my art and I can be taught things I never knew about art”.

**Behavioural Component.** The behavioral component refers to actions taken to directly influence outcomes (Zimmerman, 1995). The FGD with the soccer players highlighted that drug use was a *coping behaviour* within the community. One participant said “The reason I went to drugs was not because of peer pressure it was because of poverty”. Another participant said, “When you are idle you feel like you need something to feel, and that is drugs. If you want to be empowered you need to be strong and enjoy the challenge”.

*Organizational participation* was reported by participants in all programs. 41% of participants drew themselves actively engaging with the organization in their current situation. For participants in the art, soccer and Bright Future’s group, organizational participation is directly linked to being involved within the community due to the nature of the programs. Furthermore, community involvement was found among participants in all groups. 16% of participants indicated the urge to gain enough resources to open establishments to provide for the community. 11% of participants in this study explicitly stated their wish to impact the



community. Several other participants had implicit dreams of serving the community through aspirations of becoming a doctor, nurse or teacher.

Another additional theme found within this study was *setting a target*. All participants discussed their individual targets when describing their drawings in the future. One participant said in the FDG with the soccer players that “if you want to empower somebody you should always have your target”.

### **Defining Empowerment**

The word frequency of translations of “Uwezeshaji” to English found that “to make something happen” was the most common utterance among participants. The word “something” was counted nineteen times. In the FGD, participants discussed how empowerment related to being successful and achieving your goals. Other examples of translations include: “giving someone an opportunity”, “working better to achieve your goals” and “to have courage”. Six participants in the scholarship program mentioned that they understood empowerment to be about women and drug resistance. One participant said “I heard about it in primary school. It is about helping people, mostly girls. To train girls.” Another participant in this group mentioned that they heard of “drug abuse empowerment programs”. The male soccer player FGD related empowerment to drug abuse and discussed empowering drug users. One participant stated that in order to “empower” a drug user, they needed “the talent, the mentality and a strong belief” to stop using drugs. One participant in this FGD explained that “empowerment is like a two-way street”, explaining that it requires somebody to help you become empowered as well as your own ability to be empowered by that person. Another participant said “everyone has a reason to be somewhere, but it is strange, you always need someone to push you there”.

### **Discussion**

The results outlined context-specific examples from Zimmerman’s psychological empowerment nomological network (1995) as well as five deductive themes from the drawings and FGDs. Empowerment was defined and discussed by participants providing examples of individual perceptions of empowerment from the participant sample. Empowerment is argued to

be a value-laden term that should be defined context-specifically (Jupp and Ibn Ali, 2010). This research provides insights of what empowerment means and what critical elements of empowerment are viewed as important by participants of Uweza Foundation. Context-specific examples were successfully applied across the twelve themes from Zimmerman's psychological empowerment network as well as five additional themes that provide further context for participants at Uweza Foundation and the community of Kibera.

Literature commonly distinguishes between the 'processes' and 'outcomes' of empowerment (Swift and Levin, 1987). In this context, resources and participation are key to the empowerment process and have impacted all participants. As participants mostly defined empowerment as to "make something happen", it can be then questioned what participants would like to "make happen" which can only be answered by the participants themselves. This relates to the notion of setting a target. Zimmerman's psychological empowerment network revolves around achieving a goal and being able to do so (1995). However, upon enrolling in an empowering program, it is unclear what targets are set for each participant. In the context of NGOs, empowerment is often assumed rather than explained and defined (Page and Czuba, 1999). To this end, claiming individuals are empowered after attending school or attending a self-defence class is an assumption from the prover and not the consumer. When normative frames of reference are used, there is a risk of imposing values over embracing individual's own context-based experience of empowerment (Jupp and Ibn Ali, 2010). This is how the term started to gain criticism in the field of development, as it has been stated that the use of this word has led scholars to question whether it has led to meaningful change in development policy (Cornwall and Brock, 2005).

By setting targets with program participants, empowering outcomes can become defined on an individual basis. Luttrell et al. (2007) claim that an emphasis on empowering outcomes leads to a focus on economic enhancement and increasing access to economic resources. All drawings from participants in this research indicated a growth in resources over time indicating financial gains in their futures. It can be argued that achieving these outcomes is a priority for organizations concerned with empowerment and developing individuals' lives.

Empowerment entered the agenda of development in order to transform the approach towards development (Amutabi, 2006). The idea was to provide people with aid that can assist in creating a better life for themselves, rather than continuously supplying resources that creates a reliance on donations. This research found that not all participants are prone to ask for further assistance or feedback. Therefore, setting targets with participants as a critical process of empowerment could give both participants and the organization an opportunity to meet the set targets and offer the necessary support until they are achieved. Mentoring relationships contribute to the interactional component of psychological empowerment through helping youth understand their contexts, including norms, values, and strategies to achieve desired goals (Zimmerman, 1995). Furthermore, the notion of including participants in the development phase is in line with the concept of empowerment itself (Jupp and Ibn Ali, 2010). By setting a target with the participant and mentoring that participant until the specified target is met, organizations can improve or initiate measures of empowerment.

This research discussed empowerment on an individual level and not a community or organizational level. Therefore, it offers only insights on individuals views of empowerment. The data was collected and coded as a whole, therefore providing an overall scope of the data without providing significant insight into participants views together with their experiences. This limits the ability to measure individual empowerment although was successful in offering critical elements of empowerment on a general level for this context. Due to the nature of the qualitative data and observations of the drawings, not all findings could be discussed and only the most important ones decided by the researcher were reported.

Empowerment is said to appear in mainstream policy discourses in a diluted form (Rowlands, 1997). Bailey (1992) states that how empowerment is defined depends upon the specific people and context involved. Therefore, this research offers insights of what empowerment means to participants of Uweza Foundation. It demonstrates an approach of using a theoretical framework and a participatory research method to collect and analyze data on empowerment. It can offer researchers or NGOs insights towards their approaches to practice and define empowerment and empowering programs.

### References

- African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) (2014). Population and Health Dynamics in Nairobi's Informal Settlements: Report of the Nairobi Cross-sectional Slums Survey (NCSS) *Nairobi: APHRC*.
- Alkire, S., & Ibrahim, S. (2007). Agency and empowerment: A proposal for internationally comparable indicators. *Oxford Development Studies*, 35(4), 379-403.  
doi:10.1080/13600810701701897
- Alsop, R., Bertelsen, M. F., Holland, J., Open Knowledge Repository, & World Bank e-Library. (2005;2006;). *Empowerment in practice: From analysis to implementation*. Washington: World Bank Publications. doi:10.1596/978-0-8213-6450-5.
- Alsop, R., Heinsohn, N., & Open Knowledge Repository. (2005). *Measuring empowerment in practice: Structuring analysis and framing indicators*
- Amutabi, M. N., & Taylor & Francis eBooks A-Z. (2006). *The NGO factor in africa: The case of arrested development in kenya*. New York: Routledge.
- Bailey, D. (1992). Using participatory research in community consortia development and evaluation: lessons from the beginning of a story. *American Sociologist*, 23 (4), 71-82.
- Barcott, R. (2000). The Kibera Slum. Do NGOs Help? *Anthropology News*, 41 (9): 13.
- Brian D. Christens. (2012) Toward Relational Empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 50:1-2, pages 114-128.
- Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1988). The empowerment process: Integrating theory and practice. *The Academy of Management Review*, 13(3), 471-482. doi:10.2307/258093
- Cornwall, A., & Brock, K. (2005). What do buzzwords do for development policy? a critical look at 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'poverty reduction'. *Third World Quarterly*, 26(7), 1043-1060. doi:10.1080/01436590500235603

Cochran, M. (1986). The parental empowerment process: Building on family strengths. In J. Harris (Ed.), *Child psychology in action: Linking research and practice* (pp. 12-33). Brookline, MA: Croon Helm Publishers.

De Feyter, S. (2011). Impact of international donors' new policy agenda on project collaboration between community-based women organizations and NGOs in the kibera slums of nairobi, kenya. *Afrika Focus*, 24(1), 33-50. doi:10.21825/af.v24i1.4994

Edwards, D. B. (2019). Shifting the perspective on community-based management of education: From systems theory to social capital and community empowerment. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 64, 17-26. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.11.004

Eisman, A. B., Zimmerman, M. A., Kruger, D., Reischl, T. M., Miller, A. L., Franzen, S. P., & Morrel-Samuels, S. (2016). Psychological empowerment among urban youth: Measurement model and associations with youth outcomes. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 58(3-4), 410-421. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12094

Farrell, L. D. (2015). Hustling NGOs: Coming of age in kibera slum, Nairobi, Kenya.

Hahn Tapper, A. J. (2013). A pedagogy of social justice education: Social identity theory, intersectionality, and empowerment. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 30(4), 411-445. doi:10.1002/crq.21072

Hennink, M., Kiiti, N., Pillinger, M., & Jayakaran, R. (2012). Defining empowerment: Perspectives from international development organisations. *Development in Practice*, 22(2), 202-215. doi:10.1080/09614524.2012.640987

Hui, M., Au, K., & Fock, H. (2003). Empowerment effects across cultures. *Journal Of International Business Studies*, 35(1), 46-60. doi: 10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400067

Jupp, D., Ibn Ali, S., & Barahona, C. (2010). *Measuring Empowerment? Ask them*. Stockholm: Sida.

Kabeer, N. (2001). 'Resources, agency, achievements: reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment', in A. Sisask (ed.) *Discussing Women's Empowerment – Theory and Practice*, Stockholm, Sweden: Sida.

Kelly, J. G. (1971). Qualities for the community psychologist. *American Psychologist*, 26, 897-903.

Kilby, P. (2006). Accountability for empowerment: Dilemmas facing non-governmental organizations. *World Development*, 34(6), 951-963. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.11.009

Lord, J. (1991). Lives in transition: The process of personal empowerment. *Kitchener: Centre for Research and Education in Human Services*.

Luttrell, C. and S. Quiroz (2007) 'Understanding and Operationalising Empowerment', Paper prepared for the SDC Poverty-Wellbeing Platform.

Maton, K. I. (2008). Empowering community settings: Agents of individual development, community betterment, and positive social change. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41(1), 4-21. doi:10.1007/s10464-007-9148-6

McLaughlin, K. (2016). Empowerment. A critique. Basingstoke: Taylor & Francis Ltd.

Narayan-Parker, D., Open Knowledge Repository, & World Bank e-Library. (2002;2001;). *Empowerment and poverty reduction: A sourcebook*. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi:10.1596/0-8213-5166-4

Narayan, Deepa. (2005). *Measuring Empowerment : Cross Disciplinary Perspectives*. Washington, DC: *World Bank*. © World Bank.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/7441> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO

MacKenzie, S. B., Podsakoff, P. M., & Jarvis, C. B. (2005). The problem of measurement model misspecification in behavioral and organizational research and some recommended solutions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90(4), 710-730. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.90.4.710

- Page, N., & Czuba, C. E. (1999). Empowerment: What is it? *Journal of Extension*, 37(5)
- Porter, R. (2015). SLE in kenyan slum communities: Development of the concept. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 27(1), 67-83. doi:10.1057/ejdr.2014.24
- Perkins, D. D., & Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Empowerment theory, research, and application. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 569-579. doi:10.1007/BF02506982
- Rappaport, J. (1981). In praise of paradox: A social policy of empowerment over prevention. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 9(1), 1-25. doi:10.1007/BF00896357
- Rappaport, J. (1984). Studies in empowerment: Introduction to the issue. *Prevention in Human Services*, 3, 1-7.
- Richards, J. C. (1998). Turning to the artistic: Developing an enlightened eye by creating teaching self-portraits. In M. L. Hamilton (Ed.), *Reconceptualizing teaching practice: Self-study in teacher education* (pp. 34-44). London, England: Falmer Press.
- Theron, L., Mitchell, C., & SpringerLink ebooks - Humanities, Social Sciences and Law. (2011;2012;). *Picturing research drawing as visual methodology*. Rotterdam: SensePublishers. doi:10.1007/978-94-6091-596-3
- Tremblay, M., Martin, D. H., Macaulay, A. C., & Pluye, P. (2017). Can we build on social movement theories to develop and improve Community-Based participatory research? A framework synthesis review. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 59(3-4), 333-362. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12142
- Wegelin-Schuringa, M., Kodo, T. (1997). Tenancy and sanitation provision in informal settlements in Nairobi: revising the public latrine problem. *Environment and Urbanization*, 9: 181. doi: 10.1177/095624789700900208
- Yeich, S., & Levine, R. (1992). Participatory research's contribution to a conceptualization of empowerment. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 22(24), 1894-1908. doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.1992.tb01529.x

Zimmerman, M.A. (1984). Taking aim on empowerment research: On the distinction between individual and psychological conceptions. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 18(1), 169-177.

Zimmerman, M. A., Israel, B. A., Schulz, A., & Checkoway, B. (1992). Further explorations in empowerment theory: An empirical analysis of psychological empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 20(6), 707-727. doi:10.1007/BF01312604

Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Psychological empowerment: Issues and illustrations. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 581-599. doi:10.1007/BF02506983



Appendix

Figure 1: *Scholarship Student Triptych. Indication of resource growth.*

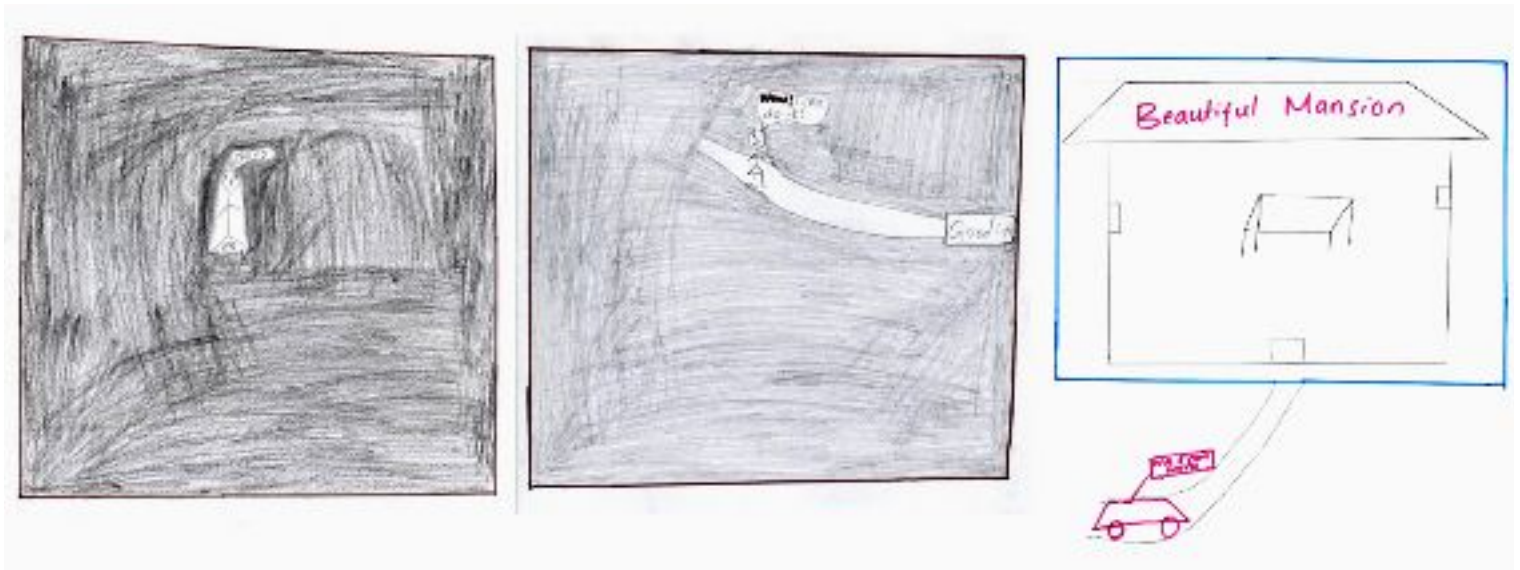


Figure 2: *Soccer Player Triptych. Community impact aspiration.*



Figure 3: *Annotated Triptych. Improvement in appearance and resource growth.*



Figure 4: *Male Soccer Player Triptych. Drug use before joining organization.*

