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Can participation 'fix' inequality?

Unpacking the relationship between the economic and political citizenship

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Can participation ‘fix’ inequality? Unpacking the relationship between the economic and political citizenship¹

Abstract

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This paper, based on a lecture given at the University of Sussex, UK, takes on the issue of growing inequality. Arguing that we know more about how economic inequality affects political participation than we do about how participation and voice (for greater civic and political equity, for example) affect economic inequality, he describes on going work to identify participatory practices that offer some precedents for linking strategies for narrowing political and economic gaps from below. These combinations in turn contribute to challenging these intersecting inequalities and hold promise for transformative solutions across the global North and South.

Many years ago, as a young graduate student, I found myself living and working in a mining valley in the rural United States. The situation was one of glaring inequality: one company owned 90% of the land, through a secretive corporate empire, based in the UK, at the top of which sat a Lord Mayor of London, then one of Britain’s wealthiest men. In the Valley itself, I saw glaring poverty, poor schools, lack of health care, a degraded environment through unchecked practices of fossil fuel extraction, a generally poor quality of life—all of these amidst enormous concentrations of wealth in the hands of a few. In my PhD dissertation, later to become my book *Power and Powerlessness* (1982), I asked the question: in a situation of glaring inequality, why does challenge to that domination not occur? Under what conditions and against what obstacles does rebellion through citizen action begin to emerge?

In that study, I traced how concentration of economic wealth in the hands of a few was translated into political power, which allowed the rich absentee landlords, through their local elites, to shape decisions and the rules of the game to their advantage over a period of a hundred years. Building on work by my supervisor Steven Lukes on the three dimensions of power (Lukes, 1974/2004), I argued that over time, power was exercised not just in the visible public sphere but also through hidden means, creating obstacles to participation of the powerless, and over time, contributing to their internalization or acceptance of an unjust and unequal status quo. That work on power has continued to shape my thinking about the relationships between power and participation to this day.

Growing attention has been paid to concentrations of wealth and growing inequality. By now the data is familiar to us all. As the Oxfam study *Even it Up* (2014b) reported: 7 out of 10 people live in countries where the gap between the rich and poor is greater than it was 30 years ago; worldwide the 85 richest people owned as much as the poorest half of humanity; there are 16 billionaires in sub-Saharan Africa,

¹ This paper is based on a lecture given as part of the Sussex University Development Lecture Series, November 6, 2014.

alongside the 358 million people living in extreme poverty; and absurd levels of wealth exist alongside desperate poverty, contributing, as the Oxfam report and many others now argue, to inequalities in health, education, and a poor quality of life.

As I read these reports, I found myself going back to my experience in the mining valley. The glaring inequalities and consequent impacts remind me of the patterns of that mining valley writ large. They cause me to reflect again on the questions that I asked some forty years ago at the micro level: How does economic inequality affect patterns of power and participation? What is the relationship between economic inequality and civic and political inequalities; that is, inequalities of power that preclude those at the bottom from exercising voice and influence over their futures?

In this paper, I will reflect further on this question in the following ways. I will first ask: 'What does the recent spate of literature on economic inequality tell us about civic inequality; that is, on the relationship between wealth inequality and inequalities in civic and political participation?' I will then suggest that we can gain insights into this relationship by turning the question around. Rather than start with how inequality affects participation, I will ask: 'How have struggles for participation and voice, for greater civic and political equity for example, affected economic inequality?' Here I will suggest that much of our work on civic inequality, my own included, has failed to link effectively to questions of economic inequality.

From this, I will turn to some emerging examples of participatory action that are linking the economic and the political spheres, and which might be more transformative than working in either sphere alone. Finally, I will reflect on challenges and opportunities that this agenda of looking at and challenging intersecting political and economic inequalities poses for development studies and development researchers.

I will not engage directly with the data on economic inequality, but will take the question of rising inequality in many countries and between countries as read. Also, on the question of terms, I shall use the notion of civic participation somewhat interchangeably with political participation, referring not only to engagement in electoral politics, but also to citizen engagement through a broad range of strategies, including participation in institutional spaces and in spaces created through popular and collective action.

1. On the links between economic inequalities and civic inequalities

Let me begin with the first question. What is the relationship of economic inequality to political and civic inequality? What does rising inequality mean for a vision of democratic citizenship, which is based on a premise that everyone is able to participate, at least to a degree, in shaping his or her future? A large number of studies have examined rising inequality, and its broader links with poverty and wellbeing. In my read, however, very few of them have taken up the question of how inequality may shape power, which in turn may affect civic and political participation (at least in any in-depth or rigorous way).

An example is found in the otherwise comprehensive and now widely discussed work by Thomas Piketty (2014). Taking a broad political economy view, Piketty examines the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. Yet I find little evidence in it, nor in the discussions about it, of the

impact of such concentrations of wealth on civic or political participation. Others have raised this same point. As Suresh Naidu (2014) writes:

Piketty repeatedly announces that politics plays a larger role in the distribution of income. But he neglects that the distribution of income and wealth also generates inequalities of larger privileges and prerogatives; wealth inequality together with a thoroughly commodified society enables a million mini-dictatorships, wherein in the political power of the rich is exercised through the market itself (para. 38).

While other recent studies similarly assert a relationship between rising inequality and diminished civic or political power and participation, few offer new evidence to substantiate this theme. Another Oxfam report (2014a), for instance, argues that inequality contributes to political capture by elites, but it doesn't look directly at the impact of such inequality on the participation of non-elites themselves.

The UN Development Programme report, *Humanity Divided: confronting inequality in developing countries* (2013), considers the topic, but in very general ways. It argues: "evidence shows that, beyond a certain threshold, inequality harms... the quality of relations in the public and political spheres of life and individuals' sense of fulfilment and self-worth" (3). These are deeply related to questions of one's sense of power and powerlessness. "Furthermore, [it states] high levels of inequality can distort political decision-making by undermining broad-based democratic participation" (7).

These are strong assertions and ones to which many of us would likely subscribe. However, in many of the policy documents, they remain just that—assertions. We lack recent empirical study on how changing patterns of economic inequality contribute to changing contours of power or changing patterns of civic and political engagement.

This question is not a new one in the social sciences, and there are a number of older studies to which one could turn to understand this relationship. In the United States, classic work by Verba and Nie on *Political Democracy and Social Equality* (1972), argues that we face a participation paradox: those most likely to participate are those who are higher on the social economic scale (SES), where those who might most need to participate, to challenge inequalities, are the least likely to do so. More recently, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, in a report on the right to participation of the very poor, made a similar argument: "Material deprivation and disempowerment create a vicious circle: the greater the inequality, the less the participation; the less the participation, the greater the inequality" (as quoted by Carmona, 2013, p. 5, from Council of Europe, 2013, p. 99).

If this inverse relationship between material inequality and political participation is true, there are a number of competing reasons given for its explanation. Some have argued that inequality across countries contributes to lower levels of trust, "which in turn, following arguments from Putnam about social capital, contributes to lower levels of civic engagement" (Uslaner & Brown, 2005, p. 4). Others argue that inequality limits the development of democratic institutions, or the development of human capital, which both in turn preclude or inhibit political participation. Others suggest that inequality allows the rich to manipulate rules of the game, to influence elections and political mobilization, and establish barriers and incentives that systematically bring some voices in while leaving other voices out of the decision making process. And still others argue that inequality creates its own norms of acceptability, which may become internalized by those at the bottom of the inequality ladder (Justino, 2015).

In development studies, much of the most significant work on how economic inequality affects other forms of participation has emerged in the gender field, and points to the importance of intersecting inequalities (Kabeer, 2010; ODI, 2014). As Kabeer writes, "Along with the economic deficits generally associated with poverty, excluded groups face additional discrimination on the basis of socially marginalised identities such as race, ethnicity, caste and sometimes religion or language, with gender cutting across these various groups." And she goes on to say, "social, economic and spatial inequalities in turn contribute to political exclusion: such groups are generally denied voice and influence in collective decisions that affect their lives" (2010, p. 6).

In general, we can see large bodies of literature in both advanced democracies and in the development context that suggest the dampening effects of material inequality on civic engagement; though few offer empirical studies on how rising inequalities affect the relationship.

However, if we do accept this proposition for the moment, we are immediately faced with two broad problems. First, we know that the inverse relationship between economic inequality and political mobilization is by no means universal. For every example of economic power limiting civic voice, we can show counter examples. Recent work, again by the Institute of Development Studies, examines how in the face of food inequalities, we see forms of collective action on food by the very poor (Hossain et al., 2014). The report by the Overseas Development Institute (2014), while discussing intersecting inequalities, also points to examples of social movements and forms of social mobilization that have contributed to more positive policies for addressing inequalities in countries as diverse as Bolivia, Ethiopia and Nepal. Other literature also suggests that while globalization may have contributed to a concentration of wealth, it also has introduced new spaces for engagement, new means of communication through social media, and the ability of protest in one part of the world to quickly fan flames of action in another. What we don't understand very well is why inequality in one case dampens participation, while in others it is met by mobilization.

But if we continue to accept the assertion that economic inequality limits or dampens civic and political participation, then we are faced with another paradox. On the whole, the very same reports that argue that inequality limits the possibilities of participation also argue that the solution lies in greater participation. The problem is also the remedy; the disease is also the cure.

For instance, while the UN Development Programme report (2013) quoted earlier argues that inequality precludes participation, it then goes on to argue that: "Tackling social exclusion and ensuring equity in access to opportunities will further require strengthening the agency, voice and political participation of groups that experience disadvantage on account of their income or identity. This will empower them to shape their environment and the decision-making processes that matter for their well-being" (5). While Kabeer argues that intersecting inequalities combine disadvantages to limit political participation, both she and the recent Overseas Development Institute report argue strongly for the need for increased political participation and social mobilization as a lever for a more equitable future. And yet, can we have it both ways? Can inequality both dampen participation on the one hand, and be 'fixed' by participation on the other? Can mobilization be a tool for 'challenging' the very intersecting inequalities through which, and by which, it has also been constrained? If so, how, and under what conditions?

II. Can participation 'fix' inequality?

If wealth inequality is linked to a broader set of intersecting inequalities, what does this suggest for concepts and practices of citizenship that challenge inequality? How do they address the intersection of economic and civic inequality?

At a conceptual level, theorists of citizenship have long argued that it is a multidimensional phenomenon. For instance, many of our understandings of citizenship in modern-day welfare states in the west are based on the concepts of T. H. Marshall (1950), who argued strongly that the realization of political citizenship was based on the ability of the state to provide a minimal economic and social floor upon which citizens could stand in the assertion of their civic and political rights. While as a liberal he did not argue for the elimination of inequality, he did realize that excesses of capitalism and resulting inequalities were a threat to full citizenship. Though Marshall has been widely critiqued for not paying enough attention to inequalities of social citizenship based on gender and other identities, his point on the link between the economic, political and social forms of citizenship remains important. Similarly, others have long argued within rights frameworks for the indivisibility of economic, social and political rights.

While some have argued for multi-dimensional forms of rights and citizenship, others have expressed this in terms of multiple forms of agency. Citizenship as agency is how rights are made real, as Ruth Lister (2007) reminds us. In dealing with intersecting forms of inequality, we must also be cognizant of intersecting forms of agency, asking how agency in the civic, social, and economic realms reinforce one another, a point long made by those who work on women's empowerment (Batliwala, 2007).

In our theories of citizenship, then, we have deep traditions arguing for the importance of multi-dimensional forms of agency and empowerment. From these it is easy to argue that in a world of intersecting inequalities, we need strategies and practices of citizenship that are also intersecting, connecting agency and citizenship in multiple spheres. And yet, as the economy becomes more and more unequal, the challenges of how to maintain this indivisibility between economic and political rights may be all the greater. Indeed, Marshall's basic conception of citizenship today may be under threat, as increasingly in many democracies social and economic safety nets are eroding, making the need to address the economic rights – as well as civic and political – in a unified way, all the more critical.

How has the practice of civic engagement fared against the goal? From 2011 to 2014, I was director of the Coady International Institute in Canada, which works to strengthen the leadership of development practitioners from around the world. In this work, my colleague Alison Mathie and I (along with others) became increasingly concerned about what we perceived as a separation of strategies between those who work on citizenship in the political sphere and those who worked on strengthening voice in the economic sphere. We scanned the literature, and in June 2014 we also brought together 25 activists and practitioners from South Asia, South-east Asia, Sub Saharan Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America to explore further dynamics between economic and political – and in some cases, environmental – strategies of citizenship engagement (Coady International Institute, 2014).

In broad strokes, what we found is quite sobering: while we can argue that there is a need for linking citizenship practices across the economic and civic spheres, our practices of participation and citizen engagement, especially organized practices by civil society and driven by donor funding, have largely failed to do so. On the whole, rather than look at how participation challenges intersecting unequal-

ities, we have allowed ourselves to segment participation into its political and economic spheres, perhaps unwittingly replicating neo-liberal models of the separation of the economic and the political set out by larger development institutions.

Now I realize this is a broad assertion, so let me talk about my own experience, as someone who has worked on questions of power and participation for many years. For 10 years, between 2000 – 2011, I served as director of an action research program, known as the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability, based at the Institute of Development Studies. Asking questions about how to make citizenship rights real, together with a network of 50-60 researchers in over 20 countries, we produced over 150 first-hand case studies on how citizens engage, participate and mobilize to express their voice and deepen their citizenship. Many of these studies may be found on our website, as well as in a series of volumes by Zed Books under the theme of Claiming Citizenship. These examine meanings of citizenship and the role of citizen action in claiming rights, demanding accountability, deepening democracy, dealing with violence, producing knowledge, acting globally and other themes. (For full information see www.drc-citizenship.org)

While this was a robust body of work, carried out with a global network, strikingly absent was the question of how deepening practices of citizenship intersected with or challenged growing patterns of material inequality. Our focus was largely on voice in the political and governance realms, not on achieving popular control over economic resources and participation in the economic sphere.

Of course, greater political mobilization is one avenue for citizens to try and change policies that in turn affect economic inequalities. We did have important case studies on how citizen mobilization led to some change, for instance to land distribution in the Philippines (Borras & Franco, 2010), or the right to the living wage in the US (Luce, 2006). But the work also showed the challenges involved of mobilizing simultaneously on intersecting inequalities. Work by Icara et al. (2010), for instance, on citizenship and trade governance in Latin America pointed to the challenges of building horizontal coalitions across environmental, gendered and economic identities on common issues arising from free trade policies. There is of course other work that begins to take up this theme – such as mobilization on tax issues – and yet in much of the work on citizen voice and accountability the theme of mobilization on the intersection of the political and the economic remains relatively absent.

III. From the economic to the civic

There is a great deal of work that comes at the issue from the other direction, which examines the engagement of citizens directly in the economic sphere. In particular, there is a large body of work by NGOs, trade unions, cooperatives, donors and others that seek to build citizen engagement in the economy itself—through participation in livelihoods and markets, through creating alternative economies, building community-based finance and credit systems, or strengthening women’s economic empowerment. The Coady International Institute itself has done very innovative work on hybrid forms of membership organizations that link to markets in new, innovative ways.

As pointed out by the UN Research Institute for Social Development (2014), the number of citizens participating in what are now widely called social or solidarity economic initiatives is massive, and evidence shows that in the midst of rising inequality, these are also growing. Worldwide, cooperatives

provide over 100 million jobs. Millions of women are involved in self-help groups and micro-finance organizations. Fair trade initiatives now involve 1.3 million workers and farmers in 70 countries.

While such initiatives are remarkable for attempting to strengthen economic citizenship, what impact have they had on inequalities more broadly? While the efforts of citizen engagement are notable, less clear is the evidence that strengthening participation in the economic sphere has led to more broadly to expansion of political and civic voice in other spheres, the reverse problem from the one discussed earlier.

An example of this issue was also found in our DRC work, as evidenced by Kabeer et al. on local self-help associations in Bangladesh (summarized in *Citizenship DRC*, 2011). Examining the impact of these self-help groups over time, the studies found that groups that focused only on microfinance contributed little to strengthening broader democratic indicators. Work just on economic empowerment had little impact on the broader inequalities facing associations' members. Conversely, "work on social mobilisation without due attention to livelihood issues may promote grassroots participation but will not overcome the barriers to economic advancement" (2011, p. 17).

Other reviews of the degree to which economic empowerment contributes to broader women's empowerment also make similar warnings. Cornwall (2007), for instance, warns of the 'empowerment lite' version of women's empowerment, now widely supported in the donor world, which looks at individual economic advancement, but very little at the broader, intersecting issues of economic and political power that affect women's lives.

One of the most comprehensive studies on citizen engagement in the economic arena is found in the UN Research Institute for Social Development report on the expansion of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) (Utting et al., 2014). The report provides strong evidence of how the social solidarity economy offers "new emancipatory potential, given its association with political empowerment and identity politics via contestation, active citizenship and claims making" (2014, p. 6). However, at the same time it urges caution, saying, "what is far less apparent is whether this potential can be realised in practice" (2014, p. 2). It urges that more attention be paid to "issues not only of economic, but also political empowerment through collective organisation and mobilisation of SSE constituents" (2014, p. vi).

So we can see the problem: While arguments for robust forms of citizenship and agency focus on the need to address intersecting inequalities, the practices of participation more often than not fall into neat categories, with little evidence of how one strategy intersects with or reinforces the other. Work on strengthened civic and political agency often ignores the impact on important economic inequalities; work on building economic participation often fails to link back to the political.

At the June 2014 Coady International Institute workshop amongst practitioners and activists, this artificial divide was seen as real, but deeply frustrating. At the local level the issues of political and economic power are often deeply intertwined, leading one colleague from Mexico to say that our approach is to kill the chicken, and then realize that it is also linked to the egg:

So let's say the problem is the chicken. We take the chicken and we ask how the chicken lives? We take the chicken and say why the chicken is moving? So I will kill the chicken and look at all the elements that constitute the chicken. But when I have the anatomy I see that the chicken is dead. Because sometimes we are trying to say "here is the economic" but for

people living the economic it is something they're doing, but the political is too and they aren't separate. I just want to say worry less about the anatomy, and focus more on the process [of how these things interact] (Coady International Institute, 2014, p. 5).

The divide in the practices of participation does not live in isolation, but mirrors larger ways in which development institutions segment local realities: NGOs and international agencies have their livelihoods departments and their governance departments; academics often work on economics or politics; the World Bank promoted PRSPs (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) in social affairs while offering very little opportunity for participation in macro-economic policies.

By allowing our practices of participation to remain separated from one another, we lose a huge opportunity to counter intersecting inequalities with intersecting strategies of popular participation. As Michael Edwards has argued, we become stuck in our development organizations and practices in providing 'thin' solutions to increasingly 'thick' problems (Edwards, 2011a). By replicating dominant definitions and segmentation, participation may simply come to mean greater access to markets, or greater inclusion in governance, but not how to challenge or transform power and inequities at the intersection of both. As Edwards (2011b) argues:

It's clear... that existing systems of politics and economics have to be transformed, not simply expanded or made more accessible to the poor, which has been our default setting for many years... So what we really need are transformative solutions that can break through the limitations of our current economic paradigm, political systems and social order.²

And as he also wrote, "these linkages can't be strengthened by doing more of the same, since we've tried that already and largely failed. So the tasks of social change are becoming more, not less complicated and contested – in other words, they are getting thicker" (2011a, p. 8).

IV. Towards a more transformative approach

This brings me to my third question: What would a more intersecting and transformative approach begin to look like? Are there new participatory practices that offer some precedents or pre-configurations to link political and economic citizenship strategies that in turn contribute to challenging intersecting inequalities?

At the Coady International Institute we launched two projects seeking to find exemplary practices of citizen action that attempted to take this more robust and interconnected view of participatory practice. One project focused on North America. Looking across Canada and the US, we sought examples of citizen-driven development that deliberately connected participation in the economic, civic and political spheres (Mathie & Gaventa, 2015).

At the grassroots level, we were pleased to find a number of interesting and exciting cases emerging of a new, more interconnected, way of citizen action. In Buffalo, New York, for instance, those who initi-

² Michael Edwards, "What does it mean to be transformative?", notes of presentation given to Coady International Institute staff members, 2011. See similar text and arguments at <http://futurepositive.org/transformation/>.

ated a project that started as a civic engagement project for young African American youth quickly realized it had to engage economic development, and then chose to achieve that by creating green jobs in inner cities, while promoting youth voices in advocating for green and inclusive economic policies (Foroughi & Garbary, 2015). A project in British Columbia focused on linking economic innovations with sustainability goals, and developed a number of micro efforts to create new local 'conservation economies' (Cunningham & Merrifield, 2015). Throughout the work, we found examples of initiatives that focused on development as the creation of multiple forms of wealth, such that success meant not only measuring the contribution of a project to economic wellbeing, but also on the impact on forms of political, social or natural resource wealth (Yellow Wood Associates, 2010).

These and a number of other innovative approaches across North America caused my colleague and I to ask (Mathie & Gaventa, 2015) whether such efforts offer hints of a new kind of citizen-driven sustainable and inclusive economy in the making. Such examples are small, but they possess within them new strategies that are potentially more transformative than previous ones.

Such approaches are not only confined to the North America. In the 2014 Coady International Institute workshop, exciting cases included "examples of women's economic and political empowerment in a micro-finance program in Indonesia, the role of cooperatives in shaping participation in economic and political spheres in Uganda, Nepal and Bhutan, the impact of the growing solidarity economy in Ghana, India and South Africa; the land reform movement in Nepal, and the experiences of indigenous peoples, new immigrants, urban migrants as they assert their claims on an economic livelihood" (Coady International Institute, 2014). Many of these examples deliberately sought to break the received boundaries between the political, economic and environmental.

Can such small examples contribute to bigger changes? I am not naïve enough to suggest that by themselves they can. But in our work on emerging micro practices of participation, we found a number of powerful examples of local approaches that sought to link multiple forms of agency, which give us a vision of what more transformative change might look like. As Gus Speth (2012) argues, examples such as these help us to envision a "new operating system," based on "new economic thinking and driven forward by a new politics" (2012, pp. 9-10). Initiatives that may seem small and local can be start-wedges that lead to larger changes and 'provide inspirational models for how things might work in a new political economy devoted to sustaining human and natural communities' (Speth, 2012, p. xi).

Micro examples of change provide clues within them to broader questions of how to scale up, how to build broader networks and coalitions for change, how to demand and open new policies that support a more equitable and inclusive economy. From the identification of such examples, a host of new questions also arise from below about how to confront power, when alternative practices at the micro level can challenge and confront macro trends, how more transformative visions of development can be realised. At the June 2014 Coady International Institute workshop on linking economic and political citizenship, practitioners were hungry for processes of research and co-construction of knowledge that would help them address these themes.

V. Implications for Development Studies

This then brings me to my fourth and final set of questions. What does such an approach for understanding and challenging the new trends of inequality imply for development studies and research? What role can we play?

By way of approaching this, let me offer a bit of a recap. So far I have made three arguments: I have argued first that the recent work documenting stark economic inequality has not been accompanied by corresponding work on understanding its impacts on civic and political inequalities. Second, I have suggested that intersecting forms of inequality call for multi-dimensional concepts and practices of citizenship that challenge intersecting inequalities in linked and synergistic ways. Yet, I have also argued that the practices of participation and civic engagement often fail to make these links, limiting their transformative potential. Third, I have suggested that we need to look for micro examples of new forms of participatory practice that employ 'thicker' and more interconnected strategies to change, and which can give clues from below about how to develop a new politics of citizen engagement that connects the economic, political, environmental and other spheres.

All of this has a great deal of impact on what we do in development studies. At the very least, it suggests a need for research on how the new trends in extreme inequality are also changing the terrains of citizenship, and for research that helps us understand in a more nuanced way when inequality dampens participation and when alternatively, it leads to mobilization. Conversely, if we expect that social mobilization and popular participation can be a lever for countering rising inequalities, we need far better understanding of what citizenship strategies can contribute to this goal, and in which settings. While a number of assertions are made in the literature, we need to examine our assumptions about how new inequalities construct power over others, and alternatively, how those on the bottom of the inequalities construct their power to act for social justice, with others, in new, more transformative ways.

While the opportunities are great, so too are the challenges. First, economic inequalities do not intersect only with social and political inequalities, but so too do they intersect with knowledge inequalities. Research funding and knowledge hierarchies all play a role in what research questions are important, whose knowledge counts, and how knowledge is used. How do we contribute knowledge to this field that not only contributes to social justice, but also helps to achieve what some have called cognitive justice? How do we ensure that our research diminishes the knowledge gaps that exist between elites and non-elites? Using a perspective of 'engaged excellence,' how can our research engage with those affected by inequality both to co-construct our knowledge, as well as to use new research to affect the inequalities we seek to study?

Second, just as I have argued that citizenship practices must move beyond their single issue silos, so too do the concepts of intersecting inequalities and multi-dimensional forms of citizenship challenge us to move beyond our own disciplinary divides. It is not just that donors and NGOs have their divisions between governance and livelihoods departments, but as academics we often remain trapped by viewing the world through our single disciplinary lens, which may separate the economic from the political, from the environmental. 'Thick solutions' require joined up, interdisciplinary understanding.

Third, if we are concerned with a politics of participation that contributes to a transformation of the status quo, not only to inclusion within it, then we must first address the question of participation for and towards what? And answering the question of participation for what takes us quickly to issues

of how knowledge shapes the visions and boundaries of the possible, as well as whose knowledge is used to shape and define these transformative possibilities.

Yet as development researchers we are often far better at producing critical knowledge and critical thinking than we are at producing transformational knowledge. While exposing and critiquing systems of power and meanings of development is important, do we do enough in our work to highlight emerging alternatives and to understand their transformative potential? Here, I am influenced by the work of Erik Olin Wright, past president of the American Sociological Society. In his Presidential Address at the ASA in 2012 and in his book on *Envisioning Real Utopias* he calls for us to “contribute to rebuilding a sense of possibility for emancipatory social change’ through both theoretical work, which helps to imagine a different world, but also through concrete empirical work, examining new innovations that ‘embody in one way or another emancipatory alternatives” (2010, p. 1). In his book, he goes on to look at a number of such alternatives, and to use elements from them to begin to construct a theory of transformation. Such arguments reinforce the arguments increasingly made to re-define development studies as the study of transformation.

Finally, the demand of transformational change, supported by cognitive justice, also challenges us to break out of our geographical boundaries. We live in a globalized world, and the inequalities we face – be they economic, political, or environmental – affect us all, whether we are in the global North or the south. Indeed the transformative solutions for the inequalities in the North may be created from the emerging economies of the South, and the seeds and visions for new kinds of economies and societies may grow from anywhere. It is by coming together, across North and South, across practice and theory, across critique and possibility that we will create and contribute to knowledge that help us to build that “other possible world”, one which, going back to Michael Edwards’ (2011b) definition of transformation, is “something qualitatively different and better, not simply something quantitatively bigger or more of the same.”

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