

Power Dynamics in Research

Considerations for Applied Research in International Development

Elyssa Lewis

University of California, Davis

March 7, 2017



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**HORTICULTURE
INNOVATION LAB**

UC DAVIS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Power Dynamics

What is power?

- It is a relative construct that relates to the ability of one actor to influence or even control another

Definition of Power Dynamics:

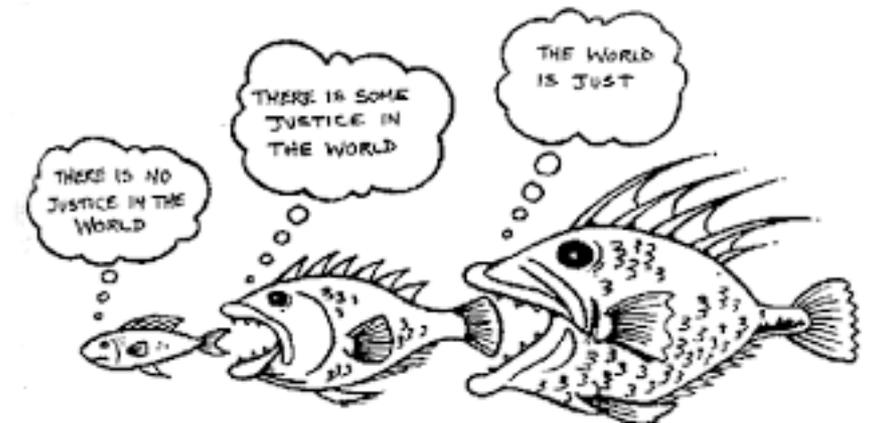
The specific ways in which power is exercised or experienced in a given context and/or interaction



Things that convey/affect power

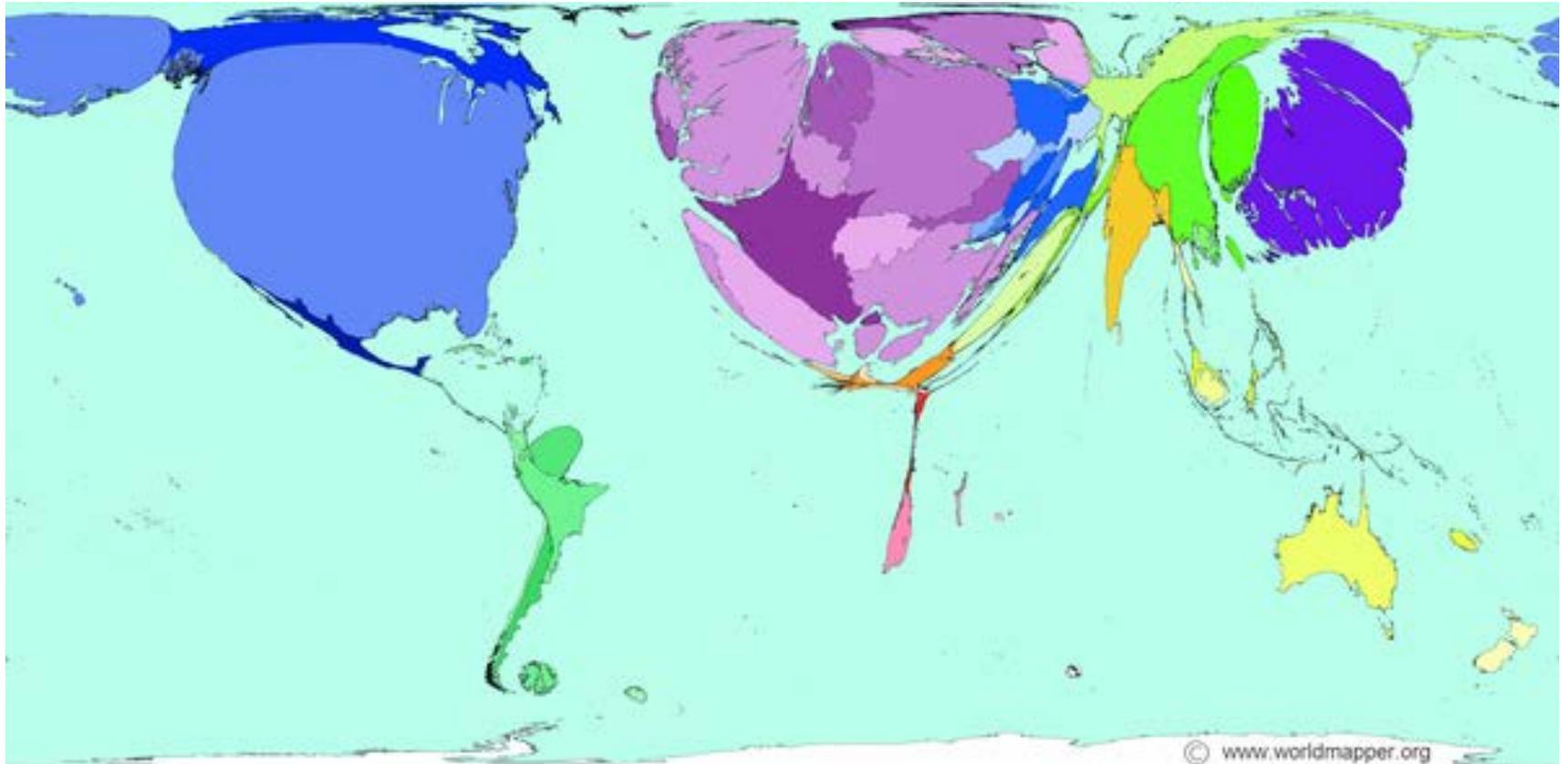
- Control over resources
- Subject matter expertise
- Institutions
- Societal norms
- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Class

What else?



Power Dynamics in Research

“The World of Science”



Source:

Some things to consider

- The history and context of the location and community in which the research is taking place
- Relationship between researcher and community
 - Research subjects/participants often have a lower status than researchers
 - This is especially true in international development
- Who determines what is valuable/meaningful results of the research
- Participatory research methods becoming increasingly popular
 - try to reduce the power imbalances through collaboration with research participants
 - *Critique*: are researchers really able to sustainably maintain equal collaborations with conditions of unequal power, access to resources, skills and time?

“[An] issue for us as professionals is to recognize the difficulty of engaging community members as partners on an equal power basis.

If we, as researchers, are interested in [community] oriented research and empowerment, then we need to understand our personal biographies of race, educational or social status, gender and other identities; how these characteristics inform our ability to speak and interpret the world and how they inform power dynamics within the research relationship itself.”

N. Wallerstein (1999)

Discussion Questions

- How have you considered power dynamic in your own research or project?
 - Times things worked well
 - Times they didn't
- What challenges related to navigating power dynamics have you faced?
- Advice and/or comments
- Como consideran dinámica de poder en su propio investigación o proyecto?
 - Ejemplos cuando funciona muy bien
 - Ejemplos cuando **no** funciona bien
- Cuales retos acerca de dinámica de poder se enfrentaron?
- Consejos y/o comentarios

References

- Czerniewicz, L. (2013, April 29). Inequitable power dynamics of global knowledge production and exchange must be confronted head on. Article. *LSE Impact Blog*. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/04/29/redrawing-the-map-from-access-to-participation/>
- Riley, S., Schouten, W., & Cahill, S. (2003, May). Exploring the dynamics of subjectivity and power between researcher and researched. In *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 4, No. 2) .
- Wallerstein, N. (1999). Power between evaluator and community: research relationships within New Mexico's healthier communities. *Social Science & Medicine*, 49(1), 39-53.