

# RESEARCHING POWER IN ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SRHR

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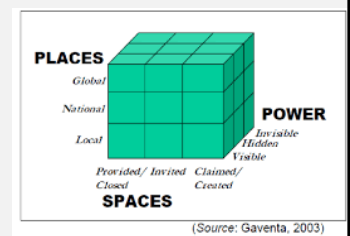
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SRHM Rights-Based Research and Knowledge Creation for Sexual and Reproductive Health Dialogue Series, 17 May 2021

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## WHAT IS POWER?

- Widely theorized in political science and the social sciences more broadly, e.g. Weber, Foucault
- Critical theories that foreground the perspectives of the marginalized, such as critical race theory, subaltern studies
- Practical typologies draw on multiple theories to provide a framework that can structure research, e.g. Gaventa's Power Cube
- Working conceptualization for this talk: "Power often derives from deep structural inequalities, but also seeps into norms and beliefs, into what we 'know' as truth, and what we believe about the world and about ourselves within it... Its capillary action causes it to spread into every corner and social extremity, but also sets up the possibility of challenge and contestation" (Sen et al., 2020)



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## POWER AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Accountability dynamics reflect prevailing power dynamics
- Efforts to foment legal, performance, social, political accountability for the realization of human rights aim to shift power dynamics
- Most definitions of accountability refer to answerability and sanctions

**Expansive definition:** Accountability refers to “constraints on the exercise of power by external means or internal norms” (Chandler and Plano, 1988)

**Shared vision:** Accountability for the realization of SRHR

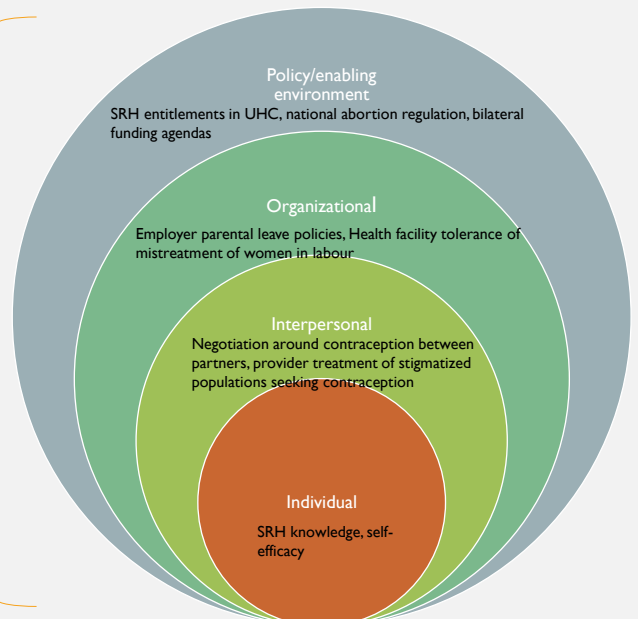
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## POWER AND SRHR RESEARCH CONTENT AND PROCESSES

### Research Processes



### Research Content



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## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Research processes: Power dynamics shape every step of the research process. An accountable process centers the priorities and lived experiences of those the research is intended to benefit, and seeks to transform, rather than perpetuate, the power dynamics that give rise to SRH and other inequities, such as neo-colonialism, racism, and gender inequality

Research content: Research on accountability for the realization of SRH should address the way visible, hidden and invisible/internalized power shape the issue under study and to what extent a given accountability effort transforms these power relations (Gaventa, 2019)

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## HOW AND WHY?

### How?

### Reflexive praxis

- Systematically consider power in research processes, starting with the research question, theory, methods
- Assess whether and how accountability efforts shift power dynamics (rather than just focusing on intermediate changes) as part of the research content
- Examples: Scott et al SACRED Birth Study; Sen et al power, accountability and SRHR

### Why?

### Foregrounding power

- The activities included in accountability efforts may not affect power dynamics; typical M&E may not assess this
- Build the evidence base about context and mechanisms
- Challenge in both SRH and accountability programming: going beyond bounded, time-limited change for individuals to sustainably influencing structures

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