The notion of empowerment has been increasingly venerated as a possible means to circumvent the long standing impasse of development (see Alsop et al. 2006:1). Empowerment theoretically avoids many of the pitfalls inherent in past development strategies as it quantifies and qualifies progression towards development in terms of power. According to this line of thinking, the pursuit of empowerment allows development to be culturally and socially specific. By increasing the power of the marginalised, such peoples are, it is argued, able to contribute to their own development trajectory in a meaningful sense, as well as to share the benefits of such progress. For many African states and their citizens, a contemporary history dominated by oppressive foreign intervention and control means that a reclamation of power is long overdue and is important in human terms to overturn the free rein of poverty which exists throughout much of the African continent. Much academic study has been devoted to conceptualising accurate definitions of the term, though little agreement has been reached (Friedmann 1992; Kesby 2005; Novak 1996), and many reports and studies have been conducted by practitioners and policy makers to find methods for recognising and measuring empowerment (see for example Alsop et al. 2006; Essama-Nssah 2004; International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) 2001:ch6; Narayan 2002, 2005; UNDP 2000:ch7; World Bank 2000:ch6&7).

In terms of practice, many strategies of empowerment have been heralded as successful by those who have delivered them. Development projects implemented at community level are asserted to increase skills, knowledge and structures of community self-awareness and organisation. According to research conducted across a variety of community empowerment projects in Zambia¹, participating community members gain confidence in their own abilities to create a future which is less dependent on the will of

¹ Fieldwork was conducted in two periods during 2007 and 2008 in a number of locations in Southern Province, Zambia.
outsiders and which has better opportunities. The outcomes of these projects are largely in line with the intentions of supporting organisations and donors, having been carefully planned to allow communities to undergo processes of self-realisation and direct the outcomes of projects accordingly. Similarly at supra-national level, initiatives such as the New Partnership for African Development have been acknowledged to be at least partially successful according to their proponents.

Thus a feeling of increased power for those who were marginalised emanates from these projects. But power is a highly complex concept. While increased self-efficacy can be a driving force which motivates and inspires, it arguably does not have the potential to overturn existing constraints to action. Moreover, while knowledge and confidence can ostensibly result in an increase of absolute power, they do not necessarily have a significant or direct relative effect on power relations given the extreme nature of the power differential between Africans and those in the ‘developed’ world. Indeed, it will be argued in this paper that, although in theory empowerment implies relative increases of power, constraints to African opportunities to harness power are actively and powerfully reproduced or ‘instantiated’ (Giddens 1984) outside of the framework of development initiatives aiming to promote empowerment. Thus, while empowerment initiatives are limited to achievable aims and objectives, they do not offer the potential to override these barriers to greater equality of opportunity for African citizens.

This paper proceeds in four parts. Firstly, the theoretical basis for empowerment is comprehensively reviewed, with particular emphasis placed on the context of sub-Saharan Africa. The second and third parts examine case study evidence from development initiatives delivered at community level in Zambia and at supra-national level using the case study of NEPAD. The final section builds on the conceptualisation of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ forms of empowerment to show how absolute power increases which arguably result from empowerment initiatives at various levels of development practice have little or no effect on the extreme differentials of power which leave African citizens marginalised. The conclusion to this paper further argues that the operation and ‘subjective’ success of empowerment initiatives actively discourages and displaces demands for more meaningful progress towards greater equality in power relations on the global stage.
**Theory of Empowerment for Africa**

In theory, the notion of empowerment holds great promise for Africa. Historical context means that Africa exists from a starting point of relative disempowerment, and it is not controversial to suggest that this balance requires righting if just development is to take place. Empowerment has the breadth required to open up opportunities for development for African communities, given that it can conceivably allow for citizens to share in the benefits of a transfer of resources. “If poverty is a condition of relative disempowerment with respect to a household’s access to specified bases of social power, then a key to the overcoming of mass poverty is the social and political empowerment of the poor” (Friedmann 1992:viii). Empowerment can “…seek to transform social and political power and to engage the struggle for emancipation on a larger – national and international – terrain” (Friedmann 1992:viii). Though the Brandt Report (1980) famously highlighted, thirty years ago, the need for a large scale transfer of resources to impoverished nations to kick-start development processes, without empowerment at local-level communities have remained vulnerable to the neo-patrimonial systems which allow wealth to accumulate in the hands of elites. Average citizens remain unable to hold their leaders accountable or therefore to become independent of the powerfully dominant discourses of development used universally by international development actors. According to the Human Development Report of 1993, empowerment is defined in three sections:

- economic empowerment as being able to engage freely in any economic activity
- social empowerment as being able to join fully in all forms of community life, without regard to religion, colour, sex or race
- political empowerment as freedom to choose and change governance at every level, from the Presidential palace to the village council

The prioritisation of empowerment as a key focus of interaction with Africa comes from a number of angles. The first and most obvious is the history of colonisation of the continent, which left African peoples oppressed and exploited and African states with artificial boundaries. The relative powerlessness of Africans during this period cannot be
challenged. Although post-colonial theory has become increasingly sophisticated in interrogating the nature of the colonial frame within which Africa is judged, the immediate post-colonial phase entrenched the extreme differentials of power between Africa and the rest of the world. The debt crisis and periods of structural adjustment combined to form a barrage of ultimately misconceived and anti-developmental effects which may be held largely responsible for the dire human consequences of impoverishment which have followed (see Hayter 1971; Simon et al. 1995). It has oft been pointed out that African elites in many cases benefited from the illegitimate use of resources at the expense of the majority of African populations, starting with the arguments forwarded by Bates (1981) and in the so-called ‘Berg Report’ (World Bank: African Strategy Review Group 1981) and culminating in extensive scholarly contributions since (for example Moyo 2009; Taylor 2006). Many African leaders and the state apparatuses they utilise are often strong and powerful under the guise of neo-patrimonialism. Such states play a crucial and pivotal role in creating both opportunities and constraints to development for their citizens. On the global stage too, African states are not marginalised in the sense of being inconsequential as Taylor and Williams’ (2004) edited volume has gone to lengths to point out. But it is precisely this factor which simultaneously makes the conception of empowerment as a developmental solution so attractive. Recognition that African states are supported and substantiated by external involvement on the continent, even whilst accepting that they are not passive actors, means that in discussions of power relations for African citizens, the state is merely another level of global power relations.

Thus, the implication that Africans are entirely passive in the processes that dictate their development chances is simply inaccurate. In addition, a starting assumption of passivity is problematic in conceptual terms for the discussion of empowerment because the theory of empowerment implies releasing power within communities or recognising existing forms of power. It recognises the inherent, vernacular powers of all nationalities and peoples, including the poor and the oppressed, in terms of innovation and creativity in directing their own development (Narayan et al. 2000). Techniques of community empowerment often include encouraging self-awareness of existing skills and resources in order to emphasise ability rather than poverty. In this sense, the notion that
African citizens are passive victims is clearly difficult to align with the theory of empowerment.

Thus a theory of empowerment aims to establish a higher level of control over development processes, which are inherently encompassing of the processes of change which are affecting all societies at all times (Payne 2005; Pieterse 1996; Sen 1999). Empowerment has been defined according to two distinct characteristics, “both the actual ability to control one’s environment (external empowerment) and the feeling that one can do so (internal empowerment)” (Deiner and Biswas-Deiner 2005:125-6). According to this thinking, holistic empowerment cannot be attained without attention to both of these dynamics. Indeed there is a simplistic parallel here with the idea that ‘development’ at local level is insufficient to institute meaningful change given that it is insufficient to impact on the structural constraints to emancipation (Mayo and Craig 1995). The following sections review the operation of two distinctly different initiatives aimed at empowering Africa and Africans in order to analyse their impacts according to the criteria set out here.

**Local Level Practice of Empowerment: Community Development Initiatives**

A number of community development initiatives in Zambia were studied to inform the empirical research being presented here. Significant commonalities were essential between projects: namely that they had a core focus of empowerment of the community as a whole. Significant differences between the projects were also essential to show a spectrum of priorities and activities in the pursuit of empowerment. The selected projects thus displayed a range of styles and were backed by different kinds of donor funds.

Three projects were selected for study: BELONG (Better Education and Life Opportunities for vulnerable children through Networking and organisational Growth) aims to increase the capacity of community schools in remote communities as an

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2 Many empowerment initiatives focus on particular groups in communities, for example women, youths, the elderly or ethnic minorities. It was important for this research to study projects whose objectives were to empower the community as a whole because the outcome could then reasonably be compared to the relative power of other communities in a global sense.

3 Community schools are set up by the community without the support of the Zambian state in areas where access to education is insufficient, inadequate or too far removed for children to get there. In recent years the Zambian Ministry of Education has started to offer financial and other resources to support successful community schools, though the policy has had mixed reception and mixed results.
effective way to support orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. BELONG is funded by the President’s Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and has a fixed timeframe of five years (2005-2010). The second case study focussed on several communities targeted by Women for Change, an organisation which works in remote communities where there is little or no other NGO or state presence. It works to facilitate the formation of community groups and offers small amounts of resources (for example livestock, bees, gardening inputs) to enable income generation, which usually require returning after multiplication. The project is also highly focussed on training community members in skills to aid in income generation and knowledge in the community on topics such as gender equality, child abuse, HIV/AIDS, communication and so on. The final case study concerns a project of Social Cash Transfers to highly incapacitated households, that is, those with no earning potential at all. The project strategy was to “economically empower the households” (Schubert 2004:1). Pilot schemes for this project were supported and implemented by CARE International and the British Department for International Development (DfID). Funds continue to be supplied by DfID, but responsibility for implementation has now passed to the Zambian Ministry for Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) under the principles of budgetary support.

According to the institutions funding and implementing these projects, empowerment was pursued according to three broad categories. Firstly there was a clear objective to avoid the creation of dependency of communities on the operation of the projects. This was deemed to be achieved by insisting on a clear demonstration of commitment from the community before the project would be committed and planning project time-frames to maintain community independence. In the case of Social Cash Transfers it was additionally accepted that some forms of dependency for incapacitated households ought to be viewed as legitimate, as they are under a ‘developed’ state system. Secondly, the notion of empowerment was linked to sustainable outcomes of projects. This was promoted by encouraging a process of ‘self-realisation’ to motivate the goals of projects, through the accumulation of knowledge and skills and by encouraging increased reliance on local natural resources. In this way, institutional representatives argued that communities would remain committed to objectives that have
been motivated through discussion and that there would be no need for future inputs. A final mode of empowerment, according to these organisations, concerned the promotion of community confidence in the abilities of citizens to independently motivate action. This process was facilitated through encouraging inclusion and equality amongst community members, by educating communities about rights and by encouraging them to develop mechanisms whereby they can represent and advocate their interests directly to powerful players who can affect their opportunities for change.

In many senses these objectives were attained through the delivery of the projects. According to community members who were interviewed extensively in a semi-structured style, there were three broad categories of outcomes of the projects which enhanced a sense of power or empowerment. Firstly, knowledge gained through skills training was highly valued as an attribute which would increase income generating potential and be passed to future generations without further assistance. In addition, community members reported positive effects of the knowledge of rights and the importance of equality, noting that these factors had mutual benefits to all members of the community. Secondly, people were proud of their increased reliance on local natural resources and on their own abilities to motivate action and effect change in their communities. Almost without exception, community groups reported that they both could and would continue with the operations instituted under the projects because they owned and were confident of the skills to do so, and because they were categorically convinced of the benefits brought to the community through these actions. This category of benefits is difficult to quantify, contributing as it does to a sense of ‘community efficacy’, a concept derived from the psychological concept of self-efficacy defined by Bandura (1994) as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives”. Such a phenomenon clearly has the potential to produce effects which are greater than the sum of its causes. The third and final category of sources of empowerment identified by targeted individuals and communities interviewed concerned the extent to which people felt greater security about their future life chances and particularly of opportunities for future generations. Increased reliability of local production mechanisms to provide for subsistence and increased reliability of economic sufficiency gave community members a
greater sense that life would improve. In addition, improved networks of communication across and between communities provided ‘hope’ and inspiration that these systems would continue to gain in effectiveness. As a result of these three categories of effects, community members stated that they felt greater power over the extent to which they were able to determine the factors they saw determining their opportunities.

The effect of projects on the communities in which they operate are not holistically or critically expressed by community members who are actively involved in the benefits of project operations however. Induced divisions and animosity in communities are arguably ‘unintended consequences’ (Ferguson 1990) of many development projects. As has been noted in the context of other development projects, power relations can be extenuated in the community through participation in project activities (and benefits) given that it is rarely the most marginalised who have the opportunity to play an active role in community groups. Therefore, those who already have some education gain skills, those who have some time to give or some contribution to make have the opportunity to play leadership roles. In the projects studied here this phenomenon was actively avoided by organisations, though it remained evident to some extent. Furthermore, some groups of people were excluded from project benefits due to the remit or capacity of project resources creating division and ill feeling amongst residents. For example in the case of Social Cash Transfers, payments were distributed only to the most impoverished ten percent of community members creating animosity in areas where many struggle to survive on a daily basis. Women for Change set an optimum group size, which restricted membership to the anger of those who were excluded.

These observations of the outcomes of projects are hardly noteworthy in themselves. They follow a well established pattern of development projects which, in their efforts to assist the impoverished, actually succeed in leaving a trail of new problems in the communities in which they operate (Cooke and Kothari 2001). However, there is arguably a rather different pattern which emerges here. Having framed the objective of these projects as ‘empowerment’, which is celebrated for its ability to make outcomes culturally and socially specific at micro-level, these projects are venerated by community members to have given them ‘hope’ for the future. In a similar way to the
promise of participation in development more generally in which “more radical thinking and action toward ‘empowerment’ and ‘liberation’ of the people is becoming marginalised” (Rahman 1995:26), processes known as empowerment are arguably working against the long-term objectives of the strategy. The outcomes of projects are, it is argued here, promoting what Deiner and Biswas-Deiner (2005:125-6) refer to as ‘internal empowerment’ while neglecting objective structural change.

Meta-Level Practice of Empowerment: NEPAD

A similar pattern can be identified in the formation and effects of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). Launched in 2001, the NEPAD opening statement reads:

“This New Partnership for Africa’s Development is a pledge by African leaders, based on a common vision and a firm and shared conviction, that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development and, at the same time, to participate actively in the world economy and body politic. The Programme is anchored on the determination of Africans to extricate themselves and the continent from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalising world.” (NEPAD 2001)

NEPAD does not use the term empowerment and it is certainly a very different ‘empowerment’ project in terms of style. However there is a clear implication here that the document is espousing the notion of empowerment, as it states: “the hopes of Africa’s peoples for a better life can no longer rest on the magnanimity of others” and recognises that past development initiatives have failed in part due to “questionable leadership and ownership by Africans themselves” (NEPAD 2001).

Launched ostensibly in the spirit of overturning the extreme differentials of power that exist between Africa and the rest of the world, NEPAD was criticised from the outset on a number of fronts. The document arose from an elite-driven process, remaining relatively closed to critical voices which might promote meaningful change (Fombad and Kebonang 2006). These elites (namely heads of state of South Africa, Nigeria, Algeria, Egypt and Senegal) are instrumental in the dense neo-patrimonial systems which have been the beneficiaries of the demise of these states during past decades. This observation has prompted Taylor (2005) to argue that to give up their power to the benefit of wider
African populations could be likened to committing ‘class suicide’ and is thus very unlikely. The agenda of NEPAD is exceedingly broad and ambitious too, making the idea of achieving all the objectives literally inconceivable.

While it may be a topic of scholarly debate to assess the potential of the NEPAD to achieve its aims, it is inescapable that nearly ten years after it’s origin, the NEPAD has failed to change the content or context of development in Africa. Indeed, NEPAD is currently morphing into a function of the African Union. The integration is due to be complete during 2010, with the NEPAD Secretariat being recreated as the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA). The African Union as an institution may be less subject to a charge of pursuing objective subjugation, but until now the NEPAD process can be analysed along such lines. It has been pointed out that that the NEPAD emphasises the role of African agency in the downturn of fortune across the continent since independence at the expense of those which emphasise the role of the international community (Monbiot 25th June 2002). In other work, criticisms of NEPAD focus on the failure of the framework to include rigorous analysis of Africa’s developmental constraints (Adesina et al. 2005).

Therefore, NEPAD too can be seen as a high level coping strategy, appearing to offer potential for African emancipation from historical patterns of marginalisation and powerlessness without truly offering any new means to avoid existing constraints to action. Criticisms of NEPAD focus on the poverty of the framework to create new opportunities of African engagement with the global political economy and thus developmental options to overhaul poverty and trade for Africa. Perhaps the strategy of NEPAD to create ‘African solutions to African problems’ is constrained by the recognition that many external factors, centring on the globalisation of neo-liberalism and its regime of ‘free’ trade and ‘development’ interventions, are core to the constraints that exist for Africa. Clearly, the objective of development and empowerment for African populations could be positively affected by African elites ‘doing the right thing’ for their people. But this is malicious over simplification of the options for such elites, given that their incomes and positions of power are interlinked in such a complex way with external actors. Recent analysis by Moyo (2009) shows that the receipt of development aid encourages a lack of accountability for African elites, while Wrong (2009) has shown
how the aid industry can prop up corrupt practice in order to fulfil its own (external) interests.

What is important here is the recognition that the New Africa Initiative, of which NEPAD is a core expression, provided a renewed sense of hope amongst some Africans and those who profess solidarity with Africa globally. This sense of hope and expectation that ‘something is being done’ may be likened to the process of subjective emancipation identified as the outcome to the community level projects analysed earlier. While the constraints of opportunity for the vast majority of African citizens continue unabated in a cycle of objective subjugation, global commentary focuses on ‘new’ high level initiatives which provide hope and quell more radical impulses for much needed change. Although NEPAD was widely criticised across academia and much of the popular press almost immediately, it has served to bring a ten year time delay in creating impetus for further initiatives. Ten years is a significant period of time, though the gravity of stagnation is emphasised in the context of Africa where the average person has a life expectancy of between forty and fifty.

**Empowerment in Africa as ‘Subjective’ Emancipation and ‘Objective’ Subjugation**

Thus, empowerment⁴ has been theoretically expounded as, and rhetorically represented as, a means to free African communities and states from the constraints of poverty in all their guises. It is presented as a route to emancipation for Africans: emancipation from historical context of oppression and powerlessness; emancipation from the confines of cultural, social and developmental standardisation due to universal development discourse; emancipation from the internalisation of discourses of poverty and underdevelopment. The multi-dimensional fluidity of the concept of empowerment is meant to be culturally and socially specific in response to the now well recognised multi-dimensional nature of poverty. The African response to projects of empowerment is largely positive, that is many see the effects of empowerment programmes at all levels of the development regime resulting in increased power for African’s over their own

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⁴ Empowerment and the wide variety of expressions that encompass the theory that Africa can take control of its own developmental trajectory, measured by culturally and socially specific methods
development trajectory. This power is discussed as inherently being linked to rejecting past and current constraints to opportunity, capacity and development.

A process of subjective emancipation, or subjective empowerment, is evident here. Africans affected by these outcomes feel a greater sense of power, a result which should be neither denied nor over-looked. In terms of the notion of community efficacy, it is not impossible that the subjective nature of the empowering process will result in an eventual transformation to objective change. But there are some important ways in which the current outcome, far from being a source of emancipation or empowerment is actually an objective source of subjugation, of further entrenchment in the cycle of poverty afflicting the vast majority of African citizens and communities. Limitations to the nature of empowerment create a barrier in practice to the notion of transformation from subjective belief to objective outcomes. Many of the apparent virtues of empowerment arise from assumed outcomes or expectations which are defined by the development discourse in just as powerful a framework as before, while holding little of the promise of their value.

Despite the subjective success of empowerment initiatives according to those directly affected, Africa and Africans continue to be constrained by the norms of global trading and neo-liberalism, by the extremities of global inequality and by the interventions of the development regime. For example, subsistence farmers cannot merely subsist because they require financial inputs to purchase agricultural seeds and fertilizers due to the promotion of green revolution technologies and the almost complete disappearance of farming with traditional seeds. The production of seeds is a patented process under world trading rules, so local production of seeds relies on some farmers to be certified to produce certain kinds of seeds under the Plant Variety and Seed Regulations 1997. For illiterate farmers, certification is a process impossible to undertake without assistance, and the cost of certification makes it prohibitive as an undertaking for individual farmers (Muliokela 1997). The ‘empowering’ solution to this, forwarded by the community for the community, and facilitated by Women for Change, is the creation of community seed banks in order to produce cheaper seed, with no need for transport, while adhering to the rules set by the international community under the World Trade Organisation and the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs)
agreement. But this so-called solution can, at best, provide a small amount of seed towards survival for those it is apparently ‘empowering’, while it is continuing to return profits to multi-national corporations profited from by those in the rich world.

Indeed, it is these profits which indirectly make up the contributions which fund these ‘empowerment programmes’. This pattern can be seen in the context of many of the kinds of power being heralded as empowerment. Access to markets for small producers in, for example, Zambia is notoriously difficult, being squeezed by higher production costs in almost every sector of industry and agriculture. Since the liberalisation of markets, once strong domestic producers like the textile industry have been crushed in opposition from cheaper imports: “Zambia's textile industry has been crushed by World Bank and IMF-imposed trade liberalization…These two institutions have forced Zambia to replace real jobs and livelihoods with charity” (Head of Policy, World Development Movement see The Observer, Mathiason 2004). This article makes clear there is a cyclical nature to this process, by pointing out the absurdity that people in the UK donate clothes to ‘charity’ which affects domestic markets with the loss of jobs, incomes and spending power in Zambia, which creates a greater need for charity.

Concessions to large foreign firms mean that government revenue remains insufficient to provide social services. For example, tax exemptions in the mining sector have resulted in lost revenue to the tune of US$15 million in 2005 alone according to a non-public IMF report (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2006). The South African supermarket chain, Shoprite Checkers, which bought the physical infrastructure of the state-owned National Import and Export Corporation under the Zambian Privatization Agency in 1996, was attributed an exemption from import duties on capital goods and an exemption from corporate tax for the first five years of operations in Zambia (Muneku 2003:96). In this case, the loss in revenue is extended to local producers who, despite Shoprite’s formal commitment to local procurement, find their markets constrained and themselves in competition with imported produce, with high standards of packaging and constant quality (Miller n.d.). Moyo (2009) also notes that small producers fail to stay in business where the aid industry floods markets.

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Clearly it is these same small producers who, when their businesses fail, are targeted by empowerment projects.

In other ways, constraints of opportunity are stronger than the outcomes of projects and initiatives aiming to empower African communities. Referring back to the Human Development Report of 1993, political empowerment should entail: ‘freedom to choose and change governance at every level, from the Presidential palace to the village council’ (UNDP). Does the empowerment that is taking place constitute greater freedom to ‘choose and change’? This research indicates that in many rural communities, greater faith is placed in NGOs to provide social services thus distancing people from political engagement and from demanding accountability (this point is also made by Moyo 2009). So empowerment programmes can be seen to actually decrease the likelihood of empowered political activity.

Significant feelings of empowerment were attributed to the model devised by Women for Change to facilitate the creation of community groups, who joined to form Area Committees, who joined to form District Associations. At this level, they could apply for independent registration as an NGO and apply for their own funding. This process brought about great excitement and a target which community members classed as empowerment⁶, despite the fact that local ownership is constrained by decisions made from outside communities, for example, which areas are chosen for projects, what kind of project is funded and the availability or provision of resources (Mosse 2001:23). A similar situation is found in many other small Zambian organisations, but many falter in their ambitions for gaining funding for their community action. They are often competing for funding with well-financed international organisations, who employ specially trained fund raising experts, and are required to have access to technology for funding opportunities as well as to complete complex application forms in English. These barriers are sufficient to make gaining funding very difficult, and they are accompanied by the fact that donor institutions often require bank accounts, auditing

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⁶ At the time of the research, the first district association was beginning the process of reforming itself as an independent organisation but it was not far enough in the process for analysis of any empirical results.
services and a plethora of other conditions which are make the system difficult to access⁷. Thus, small African NGOs continue to find themselves relatively disempowered according to the same lines as any other form of global inequality. In other arguments African NGOs have been shown to constitute a ‘comprador’ class (Hearn 2007) and to be a product of the ambitions of individuals in communities where the best chance of formal employment lies with NGO networks (Dill 2009).

The accumulation of knowledge was also viewed and valued as a powerful tool for the future by community members. The strength of commitment behind the operation of community schools alone demonstrates the commitment to the perceived benefits of more knowledgeable future generations. There is power in the discourse of education which means that it is valuing with little concern for whether or not it actually fulfils the benefits attributed to it. The concept of knowledge and discourse as power has been extensively discussed in relation to development (see particularly Crush 1995; Escobar 1995; Sachs 1992). In the case of education, standardisation again reinforces global patterns of inequality and disempowerment. A good education in Zambia would not necessarily be better than a poor one in another country, leaving even well-educated Zambians likely to be marginalised by comparison to international competitors (Esteva 2008). Insistence by donors on formal monitoring and evaluation processes have brought about new powerful discourses too about perceptions of informal community support networks or services. While knowledge of this process was treated as any kind of knowledge by community members, that is as useful skills and empowering knowledge, it is perhaps indicative of a fiercely individualistic nature to reject the more traditional ‘principle of voluntarism’ which exists in Zambian communities.

In addition to this process of breaking down traditional coping methods in societies in favour of a dependence on external development actors, other methods for advancing the supposed agenda of empowerment encourage separation between the notion of development for Africa and the logic with which it is approached in the ‘developed’ world. For all the advantages which self-reliance may be espoused to have, it has been noted that such reliance is promoted only as a factor in achieving

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⁷ One such organisation encountered in the course of this research as a recorded empirical example is the Joy Human Development Centre in Lusaka, an indigenous Zambian NGO of a grass-roots community nature, which was originally started with assistance from Traidcraft.
‘development’ in such marginalised societies (Duffield 2007). In turn, such an objective may be seen as institutionalising subjugation rather than being accurately represented by the discourse of development which encourages understanding of this outcome as empowerment.

Concluding Thoughts
Thus, while hopeful scant subsistence or subjective emancipation is afforded to those who simultaneously feel empowered, constraints exist which prevent objective power to change the African situation significantly. In turn, this process is resulting in objective subjugation, maintaining coping strategies with the present condition of relative powerlessness by encouraging feelings of empowerment without simultaneous opportunities to exercise power on the global stage. This is true both in respect of local level community empowerment initiatives, where people are inspired to feel that the changes being made in their communities are laying foundations for progress towards a more safe and secure development condition for future generations, and in terms of meta-level initiatives such as NEPAD which promote a belief that Africa has increasingly solid bases for the rejection of poverty and the ownership of development trajectories. Both outcomes deter, at least in the short term, alternative strategies to overturn the imbalance in global power relations which cause, through a complex web of interaction with the interests of African elites, the lack of opportunity and the primacy of constraint to action for the vast majority of African citizens.

Externally prioritised goals for development have long been criticised, as Clapham notes in his discussion about imparting development: “Can development be taught?...No. It can only be learnt” (Clapham 1996:823).

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