



**The Process of Empowerment in Hybrid Poverty Interventions: Evidence from  
Urban Paraguay**

**Research Outline Seminar Paper**

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## **Introduction**

This paper presents my proposal to explore the process of enhancing empowerment as experienced by individuals participating in hybrid (material and non-material) poverty interventions in urban contexts in developing countries. Given that empowerment is a mainstream concern of poverty alleviation programmes, the research is relevant to the development sector. The literature suggests that funders, programme developers, and practitioners tend to focus on empowerment solely as an outcome instead of as a process of personal and collective transformation. Further, while governments, donors, international and national organizations believe they have a good understanding of what needs to be done to achieve or enhance empowerment through programming, they are much less clear about obstacles that get in the way of realizing empowerment outcomes (Cornwall, 2016; Green, 2017; Martinez-Restrepo and Ramos-Jaimes, 2017). In other words, they concentrate exclusively on empowerment as a destination ignoring what is arguably a much more important aspect: the process of how empowerment actually happens. In addition, most poverty programmes focus solely on material interventions to enhance empowerment, ignoring the possible complementary effect that non-material interventions could have.

The lack of attention to the process of empowerment and the related lack of knowledge on the empowerment effect of material and non-material interventions together, creates an opportunity for impactful research. For this purpose, I developed a theory of change, informed by interdisciplinary literature and a specific programme case that lays out the pathway of empowerment that takes programme participants from poverty to non-poverty. Using this framework, I aim to understand the process by which hybrid poverty interventions (addressing both material and non-material deprivations) enhance empowerment in a context-specific scenario. This research proposal sets the theoretical and programmatic theme for inquiring into the process of enhancing empowerment as experienced by participants of the Poverty Stoplight, a hybrid poverty intervention originating in Paraguay.

The main question this research aims to examine is: *How do hybrid poverty interventions contribute to the process of empowerment to overcome poverty?*

My sub questions are:

- 1.1 What is the relationship between empowerment and poverty reduction?
- 1.2 Do non-material interventions increase empowerment?
- 1.3 What are the experiences of empowerment of people participating in hybrid poverty interventions?
- 1.4 How and following what steps do material and non-material aspects of hybrid poverty interventions interact to enhance the process of empowerment?

To answer these questions, I have designed a rigorous action research methodology employing a mixed methods evaluation with the purpose of uncovering complex causal mechanisms that underpin the process of empowerment. To collect quantitative data, I co-designed an original empowerment survey that will be applied to participants of the Poverty Stoplight intervention. In addition, I will conduct narrative interviews and focus group discussions with participants of the Poverty Stoplight. The main contribution that I expect to make with this research is to build an understanding of the currently opaque process of how hybrid poverty interventions might enhance empowerment. This improved understanding of hybrid poverty interventions and how they contribute to empowerment as a process and outcome can help academics and practitioners in improving poverty programming.

## **1. Literature Review**

The literature on poverty interventions and their relationship with empowerment in developing countries is deep and rich. Empowerment as part of poverty programmes has received much attention both in theoretical and empirical terms. This literature is challenging to bring together because it draws on multiple disciplines, such as history, philosophy, economics, political science, sociology, psychology, and international development, among others. For instance, it includes literature on *the origin of the idea of poverty* (Townsend, 1979; Beaudoin, 2006; Ravallion, 2015); *poverty definitions and*

*measures* (McGee and Brock, 2001; Bradshaw and Finch, 2003; Lister, 2004; Stiglitz et al., 2010; Alkire et al., 2015); *power structures and relations* (Lukes, 1974; Bourdieu, 1979; Gaventa, 1982; Batliwala, 1993; Rowlands, 1997; Hayward, 2000; VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Haugaard, 2003; Gaventa, 2006, 2007); and *development and poverty* (Chambers, 1994, 1997; Brock and McGee, 2002; Green, 2012; Coghlan and Brannick, 2014; Green, 2016). My intention with this short synthesis is not to present an extensive review of the whole body of literature on poverty and empowerment, but to identify the gaps where I will make a contribution and to use the most relevant literature and theories to develop a theory of change within which my main research question can be framed.

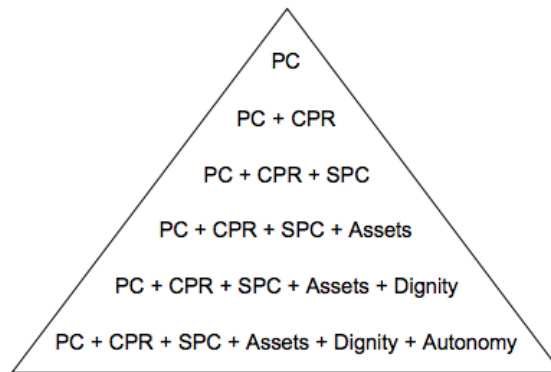
## **1.1 Poverty Concepts, Measurements, and Interventions**

The aim of this research is to understand the process of empowerment in relation to hybrid poverty interventions. I start, therefore, with understanding the state of poverty interventions in the development field. To do so, I review the literature on poverty concepts, measurements, and how they inform poverty interventions. The review illustrates that while the concept and measurements of poverty have evolved from focusing solely on material dimensions to focusing on both material and non-material dimensions of poverty, poverty interventions have also been evolving, but at a slower pace.

### **1.1.1 Concepts and Measurement of Poverty**

The concept of poverty has evolved from a focus on material deprivations to include non-material deprivations. Baulch's (1996) pyramid of poverty concepts provides a comprehensive summary of this evolution of concepts of poverty (Figure 1). The top of the pyramid portrays the longest-standing and most persistent definition, which states that poverty is comprised of material deprivations. Using this definition, poverty can be measured by means of material elements such as private consumption indicators alone, which is at the core of this narrow definition (Nolan and Whelan, 1996). Moving down, the layers show the expansion of the definition of poverty over time to include non-material dimensions of deprivation, such as lack of dignity and autonomy.

**Figure 1. Pyramid of Poverty Concepts**



Note: PC = private consumption; CPR = common property resources; SPC = state provided commodities

Source: (Baulch, 1996)

Critics argue that understanding poverty solely as a material deprivation, measured by GDP per capita for example, is not sufficient to analyze, understand, or suggest actions to overcome poverty (Lister, 2004; Narayan et al., 2009; Stiglitz et al., 2010). Authors such as Sen (2001), Langmore (2000) and Lister (2004) suggest that such a narrow notion of poverty that excludes essential non-material deprivations such as diminished empowerment, low aspirations, lack of participation in decision-making, and powerlessness. Therefore, a broader definition is needed.

Most countries and international organizations continue to use the income poverty line to determine who is poor, ignoring other vital dimensions of the state of living in poverty (Alkire and Deneulin, 2009). This is in spite of evidence that income is an imperfect indicator on its own, because it fails to provide information about distribution and fails to separate and disaggregate different aspects of human life (Nolan and Whelan, 1996; Nussbaum, 2003; Lister, 2004; Clark and Hulme, 2010). Consequently, today, policymakers and international organizations agree that the nature of poverty, and thus its measurement, should be multidimensional (McGee and Brock, 2001; Alkire, 2005; Clark and Hulme, 2010). In other words, poverty measurement should reflect the fact that people are poor in different dimensions such as economic, cultural, social, and

political (Nolan and Whelan, 1996; Nussbaum, 2001; Lister, 2004; Clark and Hulme, 2010). Echoing the shift in the concept of poverty, and in response to the call for broader definitions, the measurement of poverty has also evolved from measurements focused solely on material deprivations (mainly income) to consider other dimensions of poverty.

### **1.1.2 Poverty Interventions in Development Programmes**

Following the above-stated evolution of concepts and measurement of poverty, poverty interventions are also evolving, but at a slower pace. Today, mainstream poverty interventions continue to focus mainly on material deprivations, and only occasionally include non-material deprivations (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005; Alkire and Foster, 2011; McGregor et al., 2015; Ravallion, 2015). These material interventions focus on increasing tangible material resources such as income, education, transportation, infrastructure, agriculture, and healthcare, among others (Nolan and Whelan, 1996; Ravallion, 2015; Bastagli et al. 2016). Their theory of change (behavioural economics) is that people are rational human beings and with more resources (income, for example) they will solve their needs (Lister, 2004). For instance, they suppose that if families are able to generate sufficient income, then, they will address and solve most, if not all, of their problems.

Today, there is evidence that contradicts this underlying theory. Research has shown that if poor people earn more money they do not necessarily spend their resources fulfilling what would appear to be important to them (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011). Such behaviours may seem irrational if only using the lens of mainstream material perspectives to explain poverty.<sup>1</sup> In addition, this approach excludes non-material deprivations of poverty such as diminished empowerment, lack of participation in decision-making, and powerlessness, among others (Chambers, 1997; Narayan, 2000; Lister, 2004; Bastagli et al., 2016). These non-material deprivations of poverty are important because they have an impact on psychosocial and behavioural aspects of

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<sup>1</sup> For further information of critiques of the structural perspective of poverty, see: (Langmore, 2000; Narayan, 2000; McGee and Brock, 2001; Lister, 2004; Alkire, 2005; Stiglitz et al., 2010).

people's lives and on structural barriers to improve the lives of poor people (Appadurai, 2004; Ray, 2006; Dalton et al., 2016). There is an agreement amongst many that the material approach to poverty alleviation alone is not sufficient to combat poverty (Chambers, 1997; Sen, 2001; Clark, 2005; Alkire et al., 2015). They argue that the material approach needs to be integrated or complemented with non-material approaches for poverty elimination. In other words, the integration of material and non-material interventions has the potential to have positive impacts in different areas of people's lives.

Non-material approaches to poverty are important because they shed light on the complex challenges that people have in their day-to-day lives while living in poverty (McGregor et al., 2015). Although this perspective is relatively new in poverty interventions (Palermo et al., 2018), authors from different disciplines have explained these concepts in the past. In sociology, *false-consciousness* states that people who belong to the subordinate class, such as workers and peasants, experience false-consciousness in the sense that they develop false mental representations of social relations that systematically obscure their realities of subordination, exploitation, and domination (Mannheim, 1964; Lukács and Lukács, 1971; Gramsci et al., 1971).

In philosophy, related to the idea of false-consciousness, is the term '*misrecognition*' developed by Bourdieu (1984) as a theory of power. The core argument of misrecognition is that people are born in the centre of an active culture, and for the poor this can mean that the experience of being deprived becomes habitus, thus they adjust to their unconscious situation and do not take action to overcome poverty (Gaventa, 2003; Wacquant, 2005; Navarro, 2006).

Related to power, Gaventa (1982) studied *quiescence* and rebellion in a situation of manifest inequality. He argued that quiescence is a product of and is sustained by power relations. As a consequence, this puts the poor in a situation of apathy and lethargy where fatalism pervades, with a sense that nothing can be achieved. In psychology, Bandura (1977) developed a related theory of behavioural change called



*self-efficacy* which argues that people with low beliefs about their capabilities will have low aspirations and weak commitments to the objectives they set for themselves.

In human development, *adaptive preference* refers to the negative impact that adjusting to negative circumstances may cause to the individual's freedom (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 2001). On this matter, Sen (2001) says:

“The deprived people tend to come to terms with their deprivation because of the sheer necessity of survival, and they may, as a result, lack the courage to demand any radical change, and may even adjust their desires and expectations to what they unambiguously see as feasible” (p.63).

In the same line of thought, Nussbaum (2000) has found that individuals may have adapted their preferences, making them behave in ways that may hinder their own well-being, while still reporting feeling happy (Appadurai, 2004, 2008; Clark, 2003, 2005).

Taken together, these concepts from across disciplines suggest that the condition of living in poverty and deprivation may impact people's behaviour in such a way that people who live in poverty may think that they are incapable of changing their realities and unconsciously adjust to them instead (Freire, 1973; Narayan, 2000; Sen, 2001; Appadurai, 2004; Ray, 2006; Fishkin, 2014; Dalton et al., 2016). Therefore, they may not aspire to goals that would best serve their interests, and as a consequence, they may not take actions to overcome their deprived situation even though they have resources and capabilities that allow them to do so (Sen, 1988; Appadurai, 2004; Ray, 2006; Dalton et al., 2016). In other words, when using the non-material perspective to understand and intervene in poverty, we can appreciate that people have reasons and motives to behave as they do (Klein, 2017). This is why non-material approaches are essential and must complement the existing material approaches for poverty alleviation.

In response to this understanding, we see a trend in the development sector in making poverty alleviation programmes more holistic and well-rounded (McGregor et al., 2015; Watson and Palermo, 2016; Devereux, 2017; Roelen et al., 2017). This is achieved in practice by including the non-material perspective to current material interventions for

poverty alleviation, which I will refer to as “hybrid poverty interventions”. For instance, some poverty programmes today are combining material interventions -such as cash and food transfers, and microfinance- with non-material interventions -such as training, provision of information, access to services, and mentoring (Devereux, 2017, Roelen et al., 2017).

One of the core objectives of these hybrid poverty interventions, building on psychosocial and behavioural theories of poverty, is to enhance empowerment with the assumption that an empowered person will transform their life and overcome poverty more easily (Cornwall, 2016; Martinez Restrepo, 2016). According to Molyneux (2016), Roelen et al. (2017) and Devereux (2017), although hybrid programmes have been increasingly recognized as increasing effectiveness of poverty interventions, there is still little knowledge about how this type of programmes actually enhances the empowerment of participants (Martinez-Restrepo, 2017). What is more, most of the time empowerment is seen as an outcome of programmes, instead of as a process of personal and collective transformation (Cornwall, 2016). The combined lack of knowledge on the empowerment effect of hybrid programmes and the process of empowerment is an opportunity to do research that is useful to poverty programming (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall and Eade, 2011; Cornwall, 2016). This research seeks to generate knowledge about the process of enhancing empowerment in hybrid poverty alleviation programmes.

## **1.2 Empowerment**

Empowerment has become a “buzzword” in international development programs (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall and Eade, 2011; Cornwall, 2017). While once a term reserved for grassroots programmes to inform real changes in power relations for those who live a life of deprivations, today it has become vogue terminology by non-governmental organisations, governments, and donors (Cornwall, 2017). Cornwall (2017) presents a useful summary of the long history of empowerment in international development. In the 1970’s programmes that promoted consciousness-raising and collective action were popular in development programmes, influenced by feminist

literature. In the 1980's and 1990's there was a focus on women's empowerment, which was more radical, and focused on changing the power relationships between men and women, and promoting women's rights (Batliwala, 1993). During this time, empowerment was considered to be a process of change in collective power and consciousness (Batliwala, 1993; Kabeer, 1994; Rowlands, 1997; Sen, 1997). After this period, the use of the word 'empowerment' has expanded to become the solution to many development problems. In this expansion, some argue that the real value of the concept has been lost and the most interesting process has been forgotten: the way empowerment happens (Batliwala, 1994; Cornwall, 2016). In other words, empowerment has been viewed as a common outcome for development programmes, instead of a process of personal and collective transformation that programmes engage with to achieve poverty alleviation outcomes (Kabeer, 2000).

### 1.2.1 Definitions of Empowerment

Below, I present some of the definitions of empowerment in the development literature today.

<b>Table 1. Definitions of Empowerment</b>	
Source	Definition of Empowerment
Batliwala, 1993, 1994	Empowerment is an unfolding process of changes in consciousness, aspirations, and collective power. She cast empowerment as the process of gaining greater control over the source of power.
Chambers, 1994	Empowerment means that people, especially poor people, are enabled to take more control over their lives, and secure a better livelihood with ownership and control of productive assets as one key element.
Eyben, 2011	Empowerment is a process through which individuals or organised groups enhance their power and autonomy to accomplish some outcomes they value and have reasons to value.
Gita Sen, 1997	Empowerment is, first and foremost, about power: changing power relations in favour of those who previously exercised little power over their own lives.
Kabeer, 1994	Empowerment is the process through which women acquire the ability to exercise strategic choices previously denied to them.
Mayoux, 2000 (DFID)	Women's empowerment is defined as individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice, and to fulfil their potential.

Rowlands, 1997	Empowerment is more than participation in decision-making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions
VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002	Women's empowerment is defined as a process whereby the lives of women and girls are transformed from a situation where they have limited power to one where their power is enhanced.
Source: Author's elaboration based on Ibrahim and Alkire (2007)	

What is common across these definitions is that empowerment is a process by which poor people gain power to exercise control over their own development. This is in stark contrast to how empowerment is viewed in poverty interventions, where it is often seen only as an output. In the next section, I further develop the concept of empowerment as a process that I will use throughout this research.

### 1.2.2 Conceptualizing Empowerment as a Process

To conceptualize empowerment as a process, I make two central assumptions, derived from the literature above, which guide my research rationale. First, empowerment is not just an outcome but also a process - it is the process through which people move from being disempowered to being empowered (Mosedale, 2005). Second, empowerment is equated with changes in power (Martinez-Restrepo, 2017; Rowlands, 1997). In other words, empowerment is having the power to choose from various alternatives that were previously denied to people (Kabeer, 1999; Mosedale, 2005).

For this research, I will use Kabeer's (1999) definition of empowerment,<sup>2</sup> which understands empowerment as the process by which those who have been denied the power to make strategic life choices acquire that power. I chose this definition for the following reasons. First, in this definition empowerment is a process that entails changes in power over time (Kabeer, 1999). The change in empowerment entails the journey from where disempowered people are empowered to make choices that they value. Second, a disempowered individual is someone who lacks the power to make

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<sup>2</sup> Kabeer's (1999) definition of empowerment is specific to women. In this study, all of my research participants will be women.

strategic choices in their life; in contrast, an empowered individual is someone who has the power to control her life (Kabeer, 1999). This means that empowerment is about changes in power. Finally, strategic choices are those that transform the life of the individual for better (Martinez-Restrepo, 2017).

### **1.2.3 Conceptualizing Empowerment as Changes in Power**

As I mentioned above, empowerment is equated with changes in power (Martinez-Restrepo, 2017; Rowlands, 1997). Having briefly conceptualized empowerment as a process of change where power (the power to make strategic choices) is a fundamental building block, it is necessary to explore the underlying concept of power.

Dahl (1957) was one of the first persons to typify power as ‘power over’ meaning that a person A can get a person B to do something that B would not otherwise do. In this definition, power is seen as a conflict between two people. Then, a second dimension of power emerged, which was power as making rules to delegitimizing people or issues, and giving credit to others (Lukes, 1974; Gaventa, 1982). In this dimension, power is seen as “manipulating the consciousnesses of the less powerful as to make them incapable of seeing that a conflict exists” (Mosedale, 2005, p. 250). Another dimension also includes “non-written” rules such as social norms and customs, which often prevent people from doing things they want to do (Hayward, 2000). These three dimensions are often considered examples of a zero-sum game, where if A wins, B loses, and the “loser” may not even be aware of her loss (Mosedale, 2005).

There are also other forms of power, referred to as power within, power to and power with, with the distinction from the above definitions is that in these forms of power, one’s gain is not necessarily another’s loss (Rowlands, 1997; VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Mosedale, 2005). Power from ‘within’ has to do with assets such as self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth. Power ‘to’ is the capacity to achieve, or the unique potential for a person to shape their life. Power ;with; has to do with collective action and achievements that are brought about by a group acting together (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Mosedale, 2005). In sum, for this research, empowerment is equated with

changes in power, and power will be operationalized using the different forms of power described above. In the next section, I will discuss empowerment measures.

#### **1.2.4 Empowerment Measures**

Although there is growing interest in measuring empowerment, experts have shown that instruments and indicators to monitor and evaluate empowerment are limited (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005; Mosedale, 2005; Alkire et al., 2013). Thus, currently, it is challenging for public institutions and international organizations to obtain the necessary tools to measure empowerment of different stakeholders (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005).

For those who have identified empowerment as an essential outcome for poverty interventions, there is a consensus that it is difficult to measure (Mosedale, 2005; Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005; Alkire et al., 2013). The process of empowerment, on the other hand, is still not considered in many poverty interventions, and its measurement is barely discussed in the literature (Cornwall, 2017).

The measurement of empowerment outcomes has received considerable attention, has a large body of literature, and a number of instruments have been developed (Kabeer, 1999, 2000; Oakley, 2001; Narayan-Parker, 2002; Alsop, 2004; Holland and Brook, 2004; Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005; Malhotra and Schuler, 2005; Narayan, 2005; Alsop et al., 2006; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; Vakis et al., 2016; Martinez-Restrepo and Ramos-Jaimes, 2017). The most common way to measure empowerment outcomes is through proxies. For instance, measures of empowerment use proxies such as income, skills, literacy, and access to TV or cell phone (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005). Such proxy measures are attractive because they are tangible; thus, it is easier to capture and measure empowerment. However, proxies cannot accurately depict the complex dynamic of empowerment, which is a multidimensional concept. According to Alkire (2009), proxy measures of empowerment need to be complemented or replaced with direct measures of empowerment, such as control, ability, and advancing one's own well-being. Also, measures of empowerment should be able to view empowerment as a process, instead of an output (Cornwall, 2017).

One of the aims of this research is to contribute to the measurement of empowerment as a process by using a mixed methods approach. Specifically, this research will develop different methodological tools to measure empowerment, taking into account a) different sources of power (power over, to, with, within), b) direct measures of empowerment, as well as c) empowerment as a process. This is why an empirical study that unfolds these processes is required. In the next section, I present Fundacion Paraguaya's Poverty Stoplight, which will be the case for this research.

## **2. The Case**

This section lays out the Paraguayan context where urban and rural poverty affects an important percentage of the population. Next, I introduce Fundacion Paraguaya (FP), the largest development non-governmental organization in Paraguay. Finally, I present the Poverty Stoplight, a hybrid poverty intervention developed by FP that claims that it can reduce poverty and empower poor families.

### **2.1 Paraguayan Context**

Paraguay is a landlocked country located in the heart of South America between Argentina and Brazil with a population of approximately 7 million. The country's small and open economy is based on the exploitation of its rich natural resources. Although over the last decade this country has had one of the highest economic growth rates in Latin America (4.8%), Paraguay is far from being a developed country. In fact, it is among the poorest countries in Latin America with poor infrastructure, education, public services, and weak democratic institutions. According to a World Bank report (Lopez-Calva and Lugo, 2015), Paraguay is one of the most unequal countries in the region with a Gini coefficient of 0.48 and it is the most unequal country in Latin America in terms of land distribution (Guereña, 2013). Approximately, one in four Paraguayans suffer from poverty; 26% of the population lacks the minimum resources to purchase the basic needs that will allow them to fulfil their potential and live a decent life (Government of Paraguay, 2018).

I decided to base my research on urban poverty in Paraguay for a couple of reasons. First of all, urban poverty is now a major concern in Latin America and in Paraguay. Latin American population is the most urbanised in the developing world with 80% of people living in an urban context (Un-Habitat, 2012). In Latin America, living in an urban context is the same as living in an informal, poor, and excluded environment (Kruijt, 2007). Second, for the first time in the history of Paraguay, urban poverty is higher than rural poverty (Dirección General de Estadísticas y Censo Paraguay, 2017). This is explained by the rapid urban growth and rural migration to the cities. Although Paraguay is one of the last countries in the region to experience urban migration, towns and cities in Paraguay, like every other country in the world, are a paradox of hubs of economic and social development for some but are also hubs of deprivations and collective disintegration for others (Satterthwaite, 2003; Ravallion et al., 2007; Baker, 2008). Third, conventional poverty concepts, measurements, and interventions are not particularly well suited for urban contexts. These tend to be defined and intervene poverty at the national level without differentiating urban and rural poverty (Satterthwaite, 2003; Lintelo et al., 2018).

## **2.2 The Organization: Fundacion Paraguaya**

Fundacion Paraguaya (FP) is the largest development non-governmental organization in Paraguay with more than 400 employees and 25 offices across the country. FP works in the areas of microfinance, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and self-sufficient vocational education, with the overarching goal of eliminating multidimensional poverty in Paraguay and the world (Fundacion Paraguaya, 2018). After working for many decades in the field of microfinance, FP realized the limitations of measuring the success of its microfinance clients only based on loan repayment rates and changes in income (Burt, 2016). This is the reason why FP decided to make strategic changes and move its microfinance program from a minimalist approach to an integrated approach. The former is based on the assumption that what holds people in poverty is a lack of access to financial capital (material deprivation), and once credit constraints are removed, poor people can overcome poverty. The latter, on the other hand, is founded on the idea that poor individuals suffer from various deprivations simultaneously



(material and non-material) and that these deprivations reinforce each other (Ledgerwood, 1998). This shift allowed FP to develop a hybrid poverty intervention in Paraguay named the Poverty Stoplight with the objective to empower its microfinance clients, most of them women, to overcome poverty across 50 indicators.

### **2.3 The Poverty Stoplight: A Hybrid Poverty Intervention**

Fundacion Paraguaya developed the Poverty Stoplight, a hybrid poverty intervention, which has been used by more than 45,000 microfinance clients in Paraguay with the aim to overcome multidimensional poverty. The objective of this intervention is to “improve the lives of thousands of families through a process that enables poor families to be the protagonists of their life-changing story” (Fundacion Paraguaya, n.d.). FP claims that the Poverty Stoplight empowers people to overcome poverty, however no research has been conducted on this topic. What is more, FP is currently expanding the Poverty Stoplight to over 30 countries around the world, making this research especially relevant to the organization and for development literature (Fundacion Paraguaya, 2017).

The Poverty Stoplight consists of a hybrid poverty intervention that is applied in four-steps:

#### *Step 1: The Poverty Stoplight Self-Diagnosis Survey*

FP clients<sup>3</sup> in poor communities complete a simple self-diagnostic visual survey on a tablet to evaluate their levels of multidimensional poverty as red (extreme poverty), yellow (poverty), or green (non-poverty) across 50 indicators.<sup>4</sup> The 50 indicators are grouped in 6 dimensions: income and employment; health and environment; housing and infrastructure; education and culture; organization and participation; and self-awareness and motivation. During the self-diagnosis, FP clients are supported by FP mentors. According to Burt (2016), the Poverty Stoplight survey attempts to be user-

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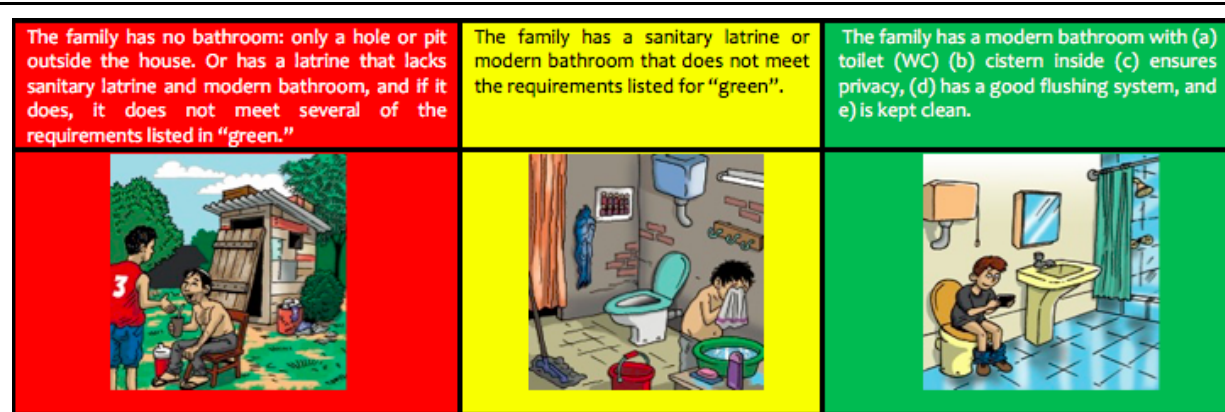
<sup>3</sup> Further on in my research, I will problematize the use of the terminology “client” vs. “participant.”

<sup>4</sup> See the full list of indicators in Appendix A.

friendly for clients to be comfortable, by using easy to understand language, illustrations for each indicator, and universal concepts such as stoplight colors.

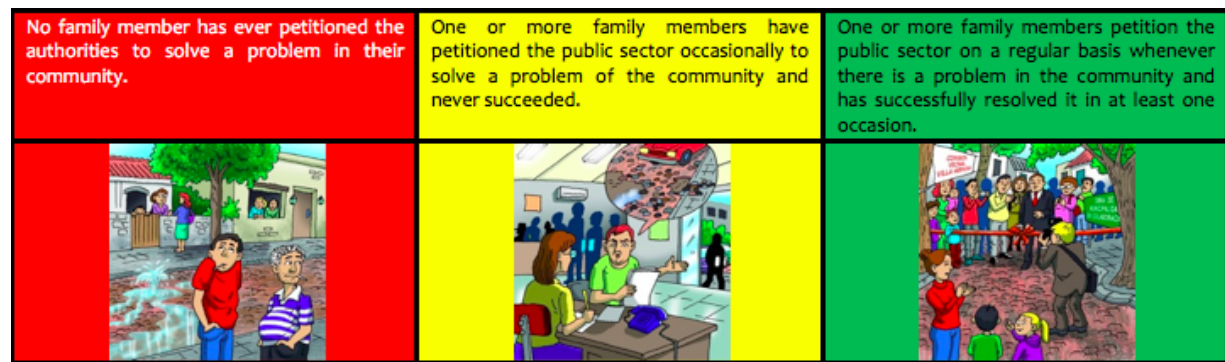
The 50 indicators include material indicators, such as monetary poverty and other classical poverty measurement criteria, but also include non-material indicators, such as psychosocial and behavioural indicators like self-esteem and organization capacity (Fundacion Paraguaya, n.d.). The latter constitute non-traditional dimensions of poverty rarely found in poverty interventions in spite of the general consensus regarding their importance. Figure 2 shows an example of a material indicator ‘Sanitary Latrine’ with illustrations representing extreme poverty (red), poverty (yellow), and non-poverty. Figure 3, shows an example of a non-material indicator, ‘Influence on the Public Sector’ with illustrations representing extreme poverty (red), poverty (yellow), and non-poverty.

**Figure 2. Poverty Stoplight Indicator 17, ‘Sanitary Latrine’**



Source: Fundacion Paraguaya, n.d.

**Figure 3. Poverty Stoplight Indicator 40, 'Influence on the Public Sector'**

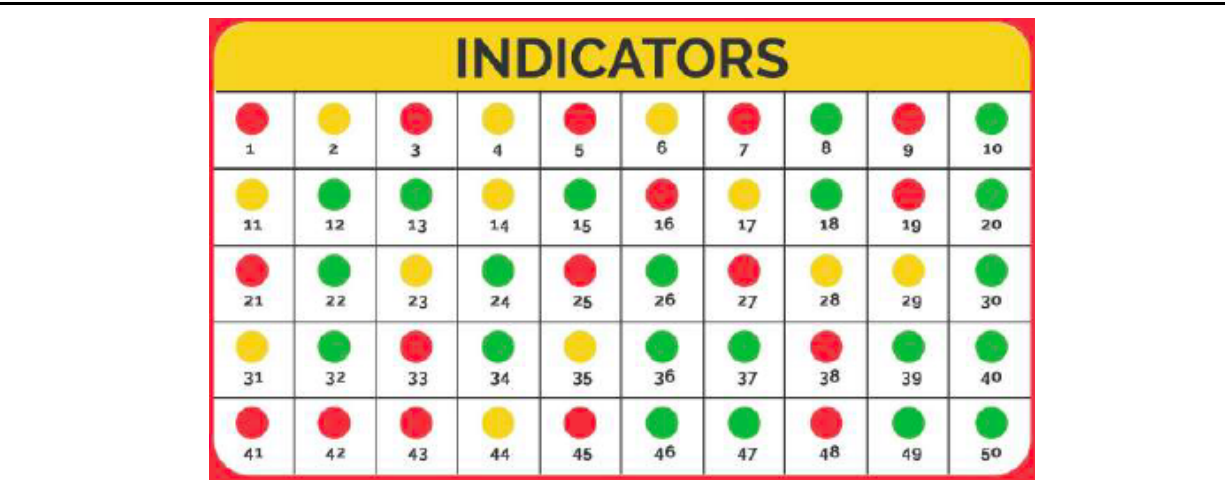


Source: Fundacion Paraguaya, *n.d.*

*Step 2: FP Clients Identify their Priorities*

At the end of the visual survey, FP clients and their families receive a printed version of the results of the survey so that they can easily visualize aspects in which they are extremely poor, poor, and non-poor (Figure 4). With these results, FP clients, alongside their mentors, identify five indicators in which they are 'red' or 'yellow', which they would like to work on and improve. According to FP, all the Poverty Stoplight indicators are actionable, and FP clients should be able to take actions to improve their indicators, with the support of their mentor.

**Figure 4. Poverty Stoplight Results**



Source: Fundacion Paraguaya, *n.d.*

### *Step 3: Implement Solutions with Mentors*

Once FP clients have chosen the five indicators they would like to work on with their mentors, the mentors work with FP clients and their families to design and implement a customized family plan to address the areas identified as their greatest challenge and develop realistic strategies to find solutions to their prioritized indicators. According to FP, by focusing on specific indicators, clients can work to resolve specific problems one at a time instead of having to deal with an abstract and unmanageable concept of poverty (Burt, 2016).

### *Step 4: Track Progress*

Finally, the progress of FP clients and their families is tracked over time. In this stage, FP clients take the visual survey again, after six months to a year, to see if there has been any progress made as indicators transform from red to yellow to green (Burt, 2016).

My aim for this research project is to uncover the empowerment effects of the Poverty Stoplight on FP clients.

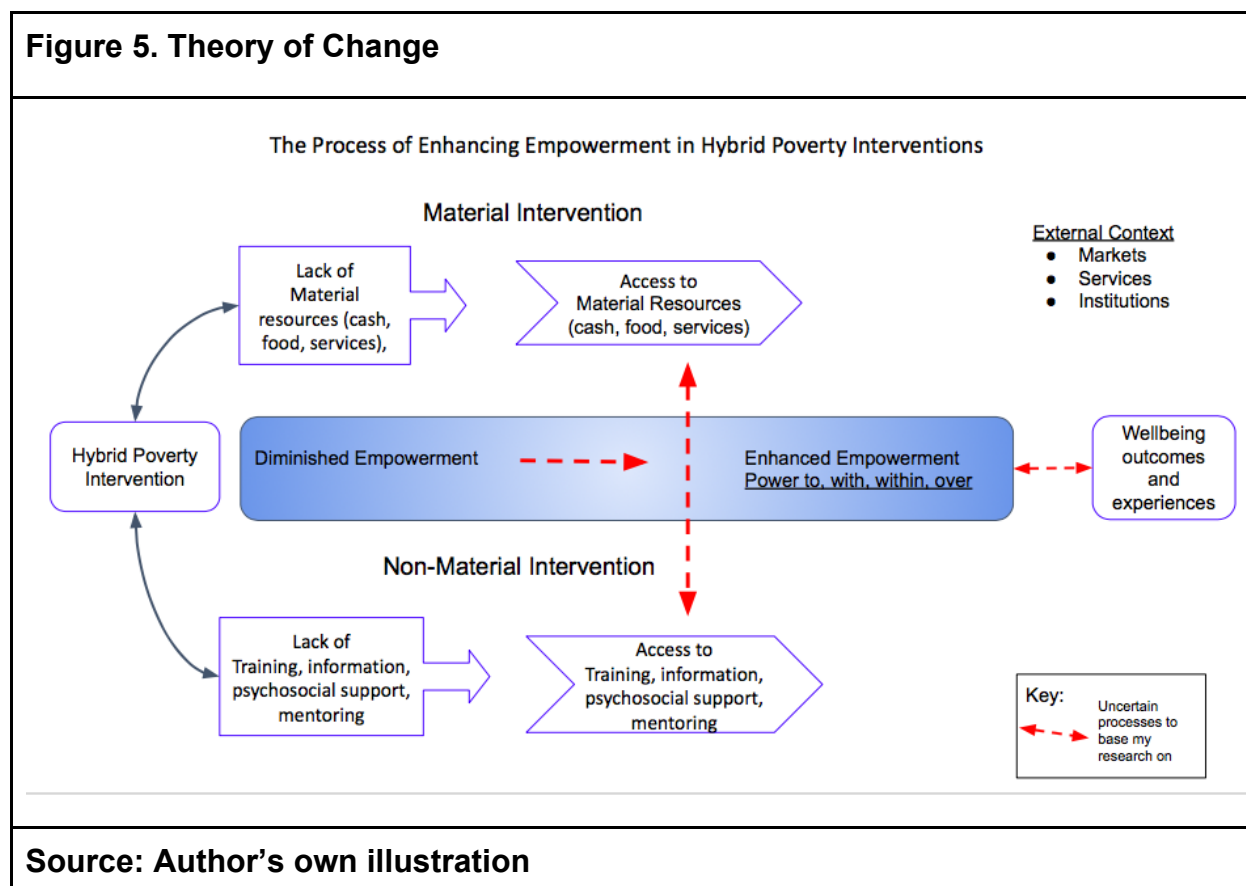
## **3. Theory of Change**

Based on the literature presented above and the case, I present the conceptual framework and developed the following theory of change:

- 1) Poverty is multidimensional; hence its solution must be multidimensional.
- 2) Hybrid poverty interventions consist of material and non-material interventions.
  - a) Material interventions focus mainly on tangible material resources such as income, education, infrastructure, agriculture, among others. This is the mainstream poverty alleviation approach.
  - b) Non-Material interventions consist of training, provision of information, access to services, and mentoring that have impacts on psychosocial and behavioural aspects of people's lives. This approach strengthens the

above approach by offering a more holistic and multidimensional perspective to poverty.

- 3) Empowerment is the process by which people acquire the power to transform their life from a situation where they have limited power to one where their power is enhanced to achieve their goals.



Rather than a set of fixed boxes, this theory of change should be seen as an illustration of concepts and sets of relationships that are dynamic and changing. This theory of change (figure 5) indicates that hybrid poverty interventions contribute to the process of empowerment for people to enhance their empowerment and transform their lives. In other words, material and non-material interventions must generate power to, with, within, and over, to enhance empowerment. The assumption is that hybrid interventions will support people in activating their power to, with, within, and over, allowing them to enhance their empowerment, and achieve the desired state of non-poverty.

The hypothesis is that people enhance their sense of 'power within' when they are supported by a programme that provides material resources (microcredit and access to services, for example) and non-material resources (training, mentoring, and information) that helps them to develop capabilities and believe that they can achieve wellbeing. In turn, this allows them to build 'power with', the coming together of various forms of association with mentors and the community to solve common issues and mobilize individual and structural resources. This allows them to achieve power to, taking concrete actions to reach their goals through a plan at the household and community level. This exercise in activating their power within, with, and to allows people to exercise 'power over' structural constraints within the household and outside the community to achieve the desired state of non-poverty. Lastly, it is important to note that although this framework it is a useful analytical tool to model the process of empowerment, it does not reflect the complexities of the process of empowerment.

#### **4. Research Questions**

My research questions are derived from the literature, the case, and my theory of change (Figure 5). My main research question is:

***How do hybrid poverty interventions contribute to the process of empowerment to overcome poverty?***

My sub-questions are:

- 1.1 What is the relationship between empowerment and poverty reduction?
- 1.2 Do non-material interventions increase empowerment?
- 1.3 What are the experiences of empowerment of people participating in hybrid poverty interventions?
- 1.4 How and following what steps do material and non-material aspects of hybrid poverty interventions interact to enhance the process of empowerment?

## **5. Research Design and Methodology**

My research aims to generate evidence on whether the Poverty Stoplight is contributing to the process of enhancing empowerment of participants. The design is built on two pillars: participatory action research (PAR) and realist evaluation.

### **5.1 Participatory Action Research**

I have decided to apply PAR in order to involve Fundacion Paraguaya staff and its clients to generate knowledge about the empowerment process of the Poverty Stoplight 'with' them instead of 'on' them (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, 2005). In other words, the experience and knowledge of FP staff and its clients is more important than those brought by 'experts' (Chambers, 1983, 1997). Specifically, FP staff, its clients, and I will create the space to be co-researchers in a co-operative inquiry where all participants work together to understand the process of empowerment of the Poverty Stoplight (Heron and Reason, 2008). In fact, I have worked with FP from the inception of this research to develop the theory of change of the empowerment process of the Poverty Stoplight (Figure 5). The idea of co-generating knowledge is based on constructivism ontology which states that there is no single reality, but multiple subjective and objective realities which are context specific (Denzin et al., 2011). Epistemologically, knowledge is acquired through collaborative research processes and methods. This requires active involvement of two or more people to do research on an issue through their own experience in order to "[understand] their world to make sense of their life and develop new and creative ways of looking things; learn how to act to change things they might want to change and find out how to do things better" (Heron and Reason, 2008, p. 179). In the next sections, I will further develop the PAR process that I will facilitate.

### **5.2 Realist Evaluation**

My design is also informed by realist evaluation, which is based on a generative framework that holds that there is a real connection between events which have a causal connection (Pawson and Tilley, 2014). In explaining this causation, realist evaluation relies on external observable causes (in this case the impact of material and non-material interventions on empowerment) but also relies on internal features of that

which is changed (what triggers the process of empowerment). In this sense, it is a theory-driven evaluation approach, and the internal features are referred to as the mechanisms. The starting theory of change of Poverty Stoplight's empowerment process (Figure 5) was built through engagement with FP and from the literature. The objective was to indicate an assumed causal relationship between the material and non-material interventions, the process of empowerment, and the expected wellbeing outcomes (with empowerment included). I will be testing this theory of change through realist evaluation. Specifically, to answer research sub-question 1.1<sup>5</sup> and 1.2<sup>6</sup>, I will rely on external observable causes, following an experimental design (with the treatment being non-material interventions) to describe causal and linear relationships between the program and empowerment. In order to tackle research sub-questions 1.3<sup>7</sup> and 1.4<sup>8</sup>, I will infer causality following a qualitative and participatory design, which will help me to uncover the mechanisms that trigger the process of empowerment.

### **5.3 Mixed Methods**

To capture causal relationships that contribute to the process of empowerment, I have decided to use a mixed methods approach for this research. However, I am not using mixed methods in a positivist sense by adding qualitative methods to inform or explain my quantitative methods. My intention is to mix causal frameworks with the objective to understand very complex processes and the underlying mechanisms through mixing methods. Mixed methods will help me define, measure, and test implied causal mechanisms of the claimed empowerment process. The purpose is to test the assumptions I propose about the causal mechanisms of enhancing empowerment in hybrid poverty interventions in order to claim attribution and contribution. While the experimental design is built to make direct attribution claims, the participatory and qualitative design are built to make direct contribution claims by understanding the mechanisms and generative causality as a way to claim attribution.

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<sup>5</sup> Q 1.1 What is the relationship between empowerment and poverty reduction

<sup>6</sup> Q 1.2 Do non-material interventions increase empowerment?

<sup>7</sup> Q 1.3 What are the experiences of empowerment of people participating in hybrid poverty interventions?

<sup>8</sup> Q 1.4 How and following what steps do material and non-material aspects of hybrid poverty interventions interact to enhance the process of empowerment?



As a reminder, my main research question is: *“How do hybrid poverty interventions contribute to the process of empowerment to overcome poverty?”* Table 2 below exposes the strategies that I will employ to answer my research sub-questions, using a mixed methods approach.

Table 2. Methodological Strategies to Answer Research Questions					
	Specific Question	Data Required	Sources and Methodology	Participants	Type of Data
1.1	What is the relationship between empowerment and poverty reduction?	Measures of empowerment and poverty indicators for treatment and control groups.	-Design: Comparative study -Methodology: Quantitative Analysis -Tool: Poverty Stoplight and Empowerment survey (base and end line)	- FP clients groups A (treatment) and B (control). - See Table 3 for details.	Secondary
1.2	Do non-material interventions increase empowerment?	Measures of empowerment indicators for treatment and control groups.	-Design: Experimental - Methodology: Quantitative Analysis -Tool: Empowerment Survey (base and end line)		
1.3	What are the experiences of empowerment of people participating in hybrid poverty interventions?	Qualitative data of experiences of empowerment of selected FP clients using journey mapping.	-Design: Participatory inquiry -Methodology: Analysis of causal mechanisms -Tool: Focus groups discussions	- Successful FP clients who have overcome poverty with the PS intervention. <sup>9</sup>	Primary
1.4	How and following what steps do material and non-material aspects of hybrid poverty interventions interact to enhance the process of empowerment?	Qualitative and participatory data of FP clients about strategies, critical moments, process and order of enhancing empowerment.	-Design: Participatory inquiry -Methodology: Qualitative and quantitative analysis of causal mechanisms -Tool: Narrative interviews		

<sup>9</sup> Measured through FP indicators.

## **6. Data Collection and Data Analysis**

### **6.1 Data Collection**

This study will use a mixed methods approach, which will consist of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Participants will consist of three types of FP microfinance clients:

- a) Those who are participating in the Poverty Stoplight intervention;
- b) Those who are not participating in the Poverty Stoplight intervention but are microfinance clients;
- c) Those who have successfully overcome poverty thanks to the Poverty Stoplight.

The fieldwork sites for this research will be seven urban and peri-urban towns in Paraguay (see Appendix B). The complete fieldwork timeline can be found in Appendix C.

#### **6.1.1 Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis**

The quantitative data collection component of this research is planned to enable the experimental social research design. It is experimental research since the strategy to uncover the empowerment effects of the Poverty Stoplight is to make comparisons between two groups, one that will receive the Poverty Stoplight intervention (treatment group) and one that will not (control group). More explanation of the treatment and control group will be provided later in this section. A central feature of this type of design is that two or more groups are set up in a random allocation of individuals (Robson, 2002). This is very important because experimental control requires determining which individuals will be exposed to the treatment whose impact is to be tested (Hakim, 2000). Randomization requires assigning the unit of study to the experimental group, which is receiving the treatment, or to a control group, which is not receiving the treatment, on a random basis (Hakim, 2000).

The reason behind doing a random allocation for the treatment and control groups is to eliminate bias. The use of a control group is relevant for my research because I will be able to isolate the claimed effect of the intervention, the Poverty Stoplight. If the group that receives the intervention shows no change in its poverty situation and no increase in empowerment, then for these groups the levels of poverty and empowerment would increase and decrease in the same way over time. However, if the group that receives the treatment shows improvements in those areas, while the control group does not, then I could infer that the poverty interventions have the effects that FP claims it has. Both groups will be studied in a pre- and post-intervention basis and at the same points in time (Hakim, 2000). After this, a comparison of the pre- and post-intervention for both groups will enable conclusions to be made about the impact or not of the treatment. The intention is to provide a richly detailed portrait of the claimed empowerment effect of the Poverty Stoplight to overcome poverty.

My quantitative data collection will consist of a co-designed empowerment survey and the Poverty Stoplight survey. For both surveys, I will have two research groups (Table 3). Group A will consist of FP clients who receive microfinance and participate in the Poverty Stoplight (intervention group), while Group B will consist of FP clients who only receive microfinance (control group).

Table 3. Research Groups			
Group Name	Intervention	Survey	No. of Households
Group A (Treatment Group)	Material (Microfinance) + Non-Material (Poverty Stoplight)	-Empowerment Survey -Poverty Stoplight Survey	400
Group B (Control Group)	Material Intervention (Microfinance)	-Empowerment Survey -Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)	400

The objective of this design is to uncover whether there is a relationship between the Poverty Stoplight intervention and empowerment. To do this, I will be comparing a group that receives the Poverty Stoplight intervention with a group that does not, and then comparing their empowerment and poverty levels. Specifically, Group A will

receive the Poverty Stoplight and the empowerment survey twice, once at the beginning of the intervention (baseline) and another, after one year (end line). Group B, on the other hand, will receive the empowerment survey twice (baseline and end line), but with no Poverty Stoplight survey. However, as mentioned above I am interested in measuring levels of poverty, but do not want to use the Poverty Stoplight survey due to the risk of “contamination.” Due to this, I have decided to apply another multidimensional poverty survey, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). The MPI is a multidimensional index used by the government of Paraguay, which contains similar indicators to the Poverty Stoplight, but uses a traditional extractive survey methodology. Using the MPI will allow me to compare the level of poverty and empowerment at the base and end line for Group B.

### ***Sampling: Treatment and Control Group***

To define and generate my sample of Group A (treatment) and Group B (control group), I will use Fundacion Paraguaya's existing selection method to my advantage to isolate a potential Poverty Stoplight-effect on empowerment. The use of an existing method to create the treatment and control group is important for two reasons. First, it will allow me to develop a counterfactual analysis to evaluate the empowerment effects of the Poverty Stoplight, and; second, it will benefit my research regarding time and resources. FP has two types of clients, (i) those who receive microcredit and participate in the Poverty Stoplight intervention, and (ii) those who only receive microcredit but do not participate in the Poverty Stoplight intervention. The former will constitute the treatment group while the latter will be the control group. Currently, clients who participate in the Poverty Stoplight are randomly selected. This is due to FP's lack of organizational capacity to offer the Poverty Stoplight to all clients, which effectively creates a control group.

Both groups will consist of a number of income-poor microfinance clients of similar characteristics selected from the same communities. The use of a control group is relevant for the purpose of my research because I will be able to isolate the claimed empowering effect of the Poverty Stoplight. Using microfinance clients as a control

group is convenient for this study because both groups (A and B) share similar characteristics, and the only major difference is their participation, or not, in the Poverty Stoplight intervention. If the group that receives the Poverty Stoplight shows no increase in empowerment, then for both groups the empowerment levels would increase and decrease in the same way over time. However, if the group that receives the treatment shows improvement in their level of empowerment, while the control group does not, then I could infer that the application of the Poverty Stoplight has a positive empowerment effect.

### ***Empowerment Survey***

The empowerment survey is a collaborative product between Fundacion Paraguaya and myself. FP staff asked me to help them design an original empowerment survey based on the best practices and the literature on empowerment. The objective was to explore the association between the Poverty Stoplight and empowerment, which is the main purpose of this research. This is relevant because FP claims that its Poverty Stoplight survey is empowering for its clients, yet no research has been conducted.

#### *a) Designing the Empowerment Survey*

To develop indicators for the survey, we proposed the following criteria. First, the indicators should be developed within the Paraguayan context. Second, indicators need to assess both instrumental and intrinsic aspects of empowerment. And third, since empowerment is understood as a process, indicators should be able to identify changes in empowerment over time.

We used the empowerment survey frameworks developed by Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) and Lombardini and colleagues (2017). These two frameworks were previously used and tested in the field and found to be appropriate measures of empowerment (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; Lombardini et al., 2017). According to Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) and Vaz, Pratley, and Alkire (2016), the majority of empowerment measures are designed to secure the concept through proxy measures such as level of education, ownership of and control over assets, employment status, and control over income. However, this

survey does not use proxies, and instead, includes more direct indicators of empowerment. Specifically, the survey framework equates empowerment as a process of enhancing power, and includes four categories of empowerment indicators (Rowlands, 1997; VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Cornwall, 2016):

- 1) Empowerment as control (power over): Domination and control over resources;
- 2) Empowerment as a choice (power to): Agency and capacity to act;
- 3) Empowerment in the community (power with): Solidarity and mutual support;
- 4) Empowerment as change (power from within): Dignity and self-esteem.

### *b) Piloting the Surveys*

Once we finished developing the survey indicators using data generated by document analysis, discussions with FP staff, and a review of the literature, FP piloted the survey and updated it based on the results. The pilot was run with FP clients. The objective of this pilot was to evaluate and consider technical issues related to the methods to assure that the survey questions were understandable and unambiguous and to have a sense of the length of the survey (Robson, 2002). It also helped to ensure that conceptually and methodologically we were on the right path.

### *c) Application of the Empowerment Survey*

The empowerment survey is currently being applied to FP clients in seven<sup>10</sup> different urban and peri-urban communities in Paraguay. FP chose these communities since they are interested in urban poverty<sup>11</sup> and one in three Paraguayans live in these areas (Dirección General de Estadísticas y Censo Paraguay, 2017). The survey will be applied twice to the same sample of individuals, using a pre- and post-intervention approach, to ascertain a baseline and measure a possible change after the intervention is applied to two different groups (see Table 3 above). This will be done with the purpose of unveiling whether there is evidence of an association between the Poverty Stoplight and changes in empowerment. Regarding sample size, there will be 400

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<sup>10</sup> Asuncion, San Lorenzo, Luque, Lambare, Villa Elisa, Mariano Roque Alonso, Ita (see Appendix B for map of cities).

<sup>11</sup> See Section 2.1 for more information on the importance of studying urban poverty in Latin America.

households per group (Table 3). For the application of the survey, FP has hired ten surveyors to carry out the empowerment survey.

### **Internal, External, and Construct Validity: Potential Threats.**

It is important to reflect on the potential threats of internal, external, and construct validity on this survey.

#### *Internal Validity*

I believe the empowerment survey could have a strong claim for internal validity in the sense that it could present a causal claim of the empowerment effects of the Poverty Stoplight, as opposed to a spurious association (Cook et al., 2002). The experimental design and the use of treatment and control groups will allow me to observe causation and compare two groups with similar characteristics in a controlled setting. However, FP and I are aware of potential threats to internal validity. For example, is there a risk of contamination? Is there a risk that administering the empowerment survey itself creates an impact? To mitigate these potential threats we checked and re-checked the randomized Groups A and B from our list of participants to avoid having people from Group A in Group B and vice versa. Regarding the potential empowerment impact of the survey itself, FP piloted the survey with more than ten clients and asked them if they felt that the questions were empowering. When they found that some questions could have some effect, then we re-worded those questions.

#### *External Validity*

This type of validity is more complex than the previous one because it is about how generalizable the results would be (Cook et al., 2002). With FP we asked, would the results be generalizable elsewhere? We believe that the answer could be positive because the Poverty Stoplight intervention is being applied in more than 25 countries in the world and the poverty intervention steps are generally standardized. This means that this empowerment survey could have the potential for external validity and be applied in those different countries around the world.

### *Construct Validity*

Construct validity is about whether the empowerment survey truly measures the concepts of empowerment that we are interested in (Cook et al., 2002). To do this, first, the concept of empowerment we decided to use is about the process of empowerment and changes in power. This means that the indicators we decided to use should reflect these two components of empowerment. Second, we used two empowerment frameworks that were already tested in the field. Third, we reviewed the literature on empowerment surveys to use indicators that the literature considers as valid. And finally, FP tested the concepts piloting the survey and making adjustments when necessary.

### ***Poverty Stoplight Survey***

The Poverty Stoplight is a self-assessment visual survey, which uses a questionnaire that involves the use of pre-coded response categories in the form of stoplight colours. While the Poverty Stoplight survey will be applied twice to Group A, Group B (see both groups in Table 3) will receive the MPI also twice. The objective with Group A is to assess any change in the 50 indicators, once as the baseline when clients are in the initial stages of the Poverty Stoplight intervention, then again after 12 months. The objective with Group B is to assess any changes in multidimensional poverty indicators over time with no poverty intervention.

### *Data Analysis*

Concerning the quantitative data, I will analyze first, whether there is evidence of an association between the participation of the Poverty Stoplight and its presumed empowerment effects on poor individuals. Second, I will also analyze if there is an association between empowerment and poverty reduction. Third, if it is determined that this intervention does empower FP participants to overcome poverty, I will analyze how empowering it is. Fourth, I will determine whether certain Poverty Stoplight indicators reflected more improvement in empowerment than others. I will do this by using STATA software. This quantitative data analysis will use an econometric panel data. The purpose of this model is to compare at two points in time (pre- and post-intervention) the



group of clients who benefited from the Poverty Stoplight (treatment group) with FP clients who only will receive loans (control group).

### **6.1.2 Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis**

My qualitative data collection methods will consist of participatory inquiry in collaboration with FP clients to collect data and analyze the causal mechanisms of the claimed Poverty Stoplight empowerment effects. I will use two techniques for this purpose, focus group discussions and narratives interviews. The qualitative data will be used to enable a picture of both the process of empowerment, as experienced by participants, and to identify the mechanisms that trigger the causal changes the theory of change sets out. In this way, it fills a gap and answers the question ‘how did change (the process of empowerment) happen for these participants?’ in contrast to the counterfactual analysis of survey data that can answer ‘was there an effect of the treatment?’ Together, mixing methods in this way will enable credible and robust findings on the mechanisms that trigger empowerment, as well as what outcomes are achieved as a result. Evidence of attribution is sought through respondent’s own accounts of contributing causal mechanisms linking the Poverty Stoplight to the process of enhancing empowerment.

#### ***Focus Group Discussions***

I will use FGDs to collect qualitative data on the experiences of FP clients who according to FP have overcome poverty (measured through FP’s indicators) while participating in the Poverty Stoplight intervention. These participants could provide useful information about the process of empowerment claimed by FP and answer question 1.3<sup>12</sup>. This will help me to understand the journey clients went through in their pathway to empowerment. Specifically, I will attempt to uncover the process of empowerment, and what triggered it. I will use a backward technique called Journey Mapping with the aim to, retrospectively, develop questions related to the process of empowerment. For example, if participants have overcome poverty in certain indicators,

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<sup>12</sup> Q 1.3. What are the experiences of empowerment of people participating in hybrid poverty interventions?

I will ask them to describe what were the critical moments when they feel they had power to, with, over, and within. I will ask them to describe this process. With the support of FP, I will conduct seven focus group discussions with 10-15 clients in each of the seven different cities.

### ***Narrative Interviews***

I will conduct narratives interviews to collect 200 short stories with Fundacion Paraguaya clients with the intention to uncover the complex process of empowerment that hypothetically occurs when the Poverty Stoplight is applied. The narrative approach is a type of unstructured interview that are well suited to describe complex and non-linear social processes, such as the way empowerment happens, because narrative interviews allow the researcher to collect real-life stories and understand participant experiences (Boje, 2002). In order to capture narratives, I am exploring the use of SenseMaker, which is a narrative-based research methodology and software that will allow me to capture and analyze large a quantity of stories in order to uncover the complex process of empowerment. This methodology involves the collection of large numbers of short narratives that will help me to create a nuanced picture of the empowerment process. This will allow clients to become “storytellers” and to conduct the primary analysis of their own experiences of empowerment reducing potential interpretative bias and promoting participants involvements in this research.

The narrative interviews will start with a set of questions based on predefined topics obtained from the focus group discussions (sub-question 1.3<sup>13</sup>) and the literature on empowerment that will allow the client (storyteller) to analyze her own story. The process has two steps; first, I expect to collect short responses regarding the process of empowerment of the Poverty Stoplight. These narrative interviews will seek to answer sub-question 1.4<sup>14</sup>. After each participant has told their short story, they will be asked to place their story within a triad of elements that will describe the process of

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<sup>13</sup> Q 1.3. What are the experiences of empowerment of people participating in hybrid poverty interventions?

<sup>14</sup> Q 1.4. How and following what steps do material and non-material aspects of hybrid poverty interventions interact to enhance the process of empowerment?

empowerment. This set of questions is called a 'signification framework'. The participant will place a mark within the triad, based on how strongly she feels each element is present in her story (Sardone and Wong, 2010). The power of stories lie in that they have a dramatic descriptive power as people reveal in stories feelings and opinions that they would/could not reveal if asked a direct question, which will complement the empowerment survey (Sardone and Wong, 2010).

Regarding the qualitative data analysis, the objective is to identify what triggers the causal mechanisms of empowerment for FP clients who participate in the Poverty Stoplight. To analyze the focus group data, I will use grounded codes and predetermined codes in my analysis. According to Saldana (2015), grounded codes will allow me to be open to unexpected themes, while pre-established codes will help me to maintain the focus of the main themes I am looking for related to my research questions. For the systematization and content analysis of my codes, I will use NVivo, a qualitative software package that it is used to organize and analyze information gathered through my qualitative methods. The objective of the analysis will be to determine the experiences of empowerment of FP clients after participating in the Poverty Stoplight. SenseMaker software will allow me to analyze a large quantity of stories. Specifically, it offers a methodological design to find common themes emerging from the stories. The software also offers visual representation of data, which can also be exported as statistical data.

### **6.3 Advantages and Limitations**

I have identified some advantages for this research project. First, I have established a working relationship with Fundacion Paraguaya staff who have given me full access to different organizational resources and data and have committed to help me once in the field. Second, FP has expressed that this research is valuable for the organization and that they will be using my empowerment survey as part of their internal monitoring and evaluation. This is a great opportunity to not only be more efficient with resources but also to collaborate with FP and make a real contribution. Third, I have secured funding to conduct this research, which includes travel and fieldwork, among other expenses.

Forth, as a Paraguayan with many years of experience working on poverty issues, I understand the social, economic, and political context of the country and the development field. Thus, I will be able to interact with different institutions and stakeholders to support my research.

There are potential limitations associated with this research that must also be addressed. First and most importantly, since participants are in a relationship with FP, they may fear to be sincere and open about their experiences. Second, access to clients and staff of FP could be limited by their time. Concerning this challenge, I also need to think about how to avoid and reduce attrition rate from my treatment and control group. Third, many clients do not speak Spanish and only speak Guaraní, the native language of Paraguay. Although I understand the native language, I cannot speak fluently. In the case that I conduct the research alongside a FP staff member that is fluent in Guarani, there is a possibility of misrepresenting both questions and answers. Lastly, another potential limitation will be the lack of control over external variables that might affect the different groups, treatment, and control.

#### **6.4 Reflexivity**

Given that I am using constructivist epistemology and I am using Action Research I must acknowledge the ways I am going to affect and be affected by this research (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). Self-reflection and self-criticism will benefit my research because it will help me to develop more trustworthy processes and findings (Probst and Berenson, 2014). According to Crabtree and Miller (1999) “knowing yourself and how you affect and are changed by the research enterprise are central to field research and, ideally, occur throughout the research process” (p. 14). I am from Paraguay and have lived most of my life in both the capital and countryside of Paraguay. I have 13 years of work experience in different institutions such as different branches of the government, NGOs, and the private sector, all related to development issues. My last work experience was in the field of poverty where I had a direct role in the design, implementation, and evaluation of poverty alleviation programs in Paraguay. This background and work experiences have sparked my interest in this research project.

However, I am aware that this situation also has shaped the way I see poverty as a field of my analysis. In other words, I am developing this research with some preconceived notions and views about poverty. Therefore, I need to be reflective during this research because my experience could have both positive and negative implications. A reflective approach that will help me to deal with this issue is keeping a self-reflective journal with the purpose of making my experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings about the research visible and transparent (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). This journal will facilitate not only to examine my personal assumptions, goals, and clarify my beliefs about this research but also it will make my research open to scrutiny (Ortlipp, 2008). In addition, I will be in constant contact with my supervisors and colleagues during my fieldwork.

## **6.5 Ethical Considerations**

The most important challenge I will face is related to potential emotional involvement with this new approach to overcome poverty. I found this poverty intervention fascinating and innovative. To avoid my own potential biases, I will use reflexivity and develop some strategies throughout this research to cope with this potential ethical consideration. Another potential issue is the expectation of the organization to receive positive results after my research. To mitigate this expectation, I will be transparent and prudent when explaining the organization the aims and possible results of this research. Regarding my interaction with poor individuals, I asked myself how appropriate is to assist them with compensation for their participation and time. Robson (2002) mentions that this is a complex situation that depends on the context and relationship with participants. I will decide this issue by talking with FP staff that already has experience in dealing with compensation. I will also make sure that participation is voluntary and fully informed. I will do this by using verbal consent with clear statements about the research and the role of participants (Blaikie, 2009). Concerning privacy, all the information collected will be anonymized and coded. When conducting interviews and focus group, I will avoid information about their identities and only collect demographic and background information. The ethical concern regarding giving the treatment to some group while denying to the other is justified with the fact that FP would not be able to apply the Poverty Stoplight to every client due to its lack of capacity, and not for the

purpose of this project. Finally, the University of Sussex has strict ethical procedures that help students like me to walk through the protocol when working with vulnerable groups such as poor households. This ethical process will be completed before I start my fieldwork.

## **7. Impact and Relevance to International Development**

This research proposes a theoretical and policy study concerned with international development. On the one hand, it is theoretical because its interest is about the causal processes and explanation of empowerment to overcome poverty. It is also theoretical because the purpose of this research is to create new knowledge for a better understanding of hybrid poverty interventions. The intended audience is, therefore, the social science community in general. On the other hand, it is policy research because its objective is also to develop knowledge for action to change the world of the poor, not just its understanding. Also, it is related to policy because its audiences are policymakers, decision-makers, and pressure groups (Hakim, 2000). This research expects to have a positive impact on academia and practitioners thanks to its originality. This proposed research is original because the empirical work I intend to carry out has not been done before. Specifically, there is a lack of knowledge on how empowerment happens in hybrid poverty interventions. My final hope is to clarify and advance knowledge for poverty elimination in development practice.

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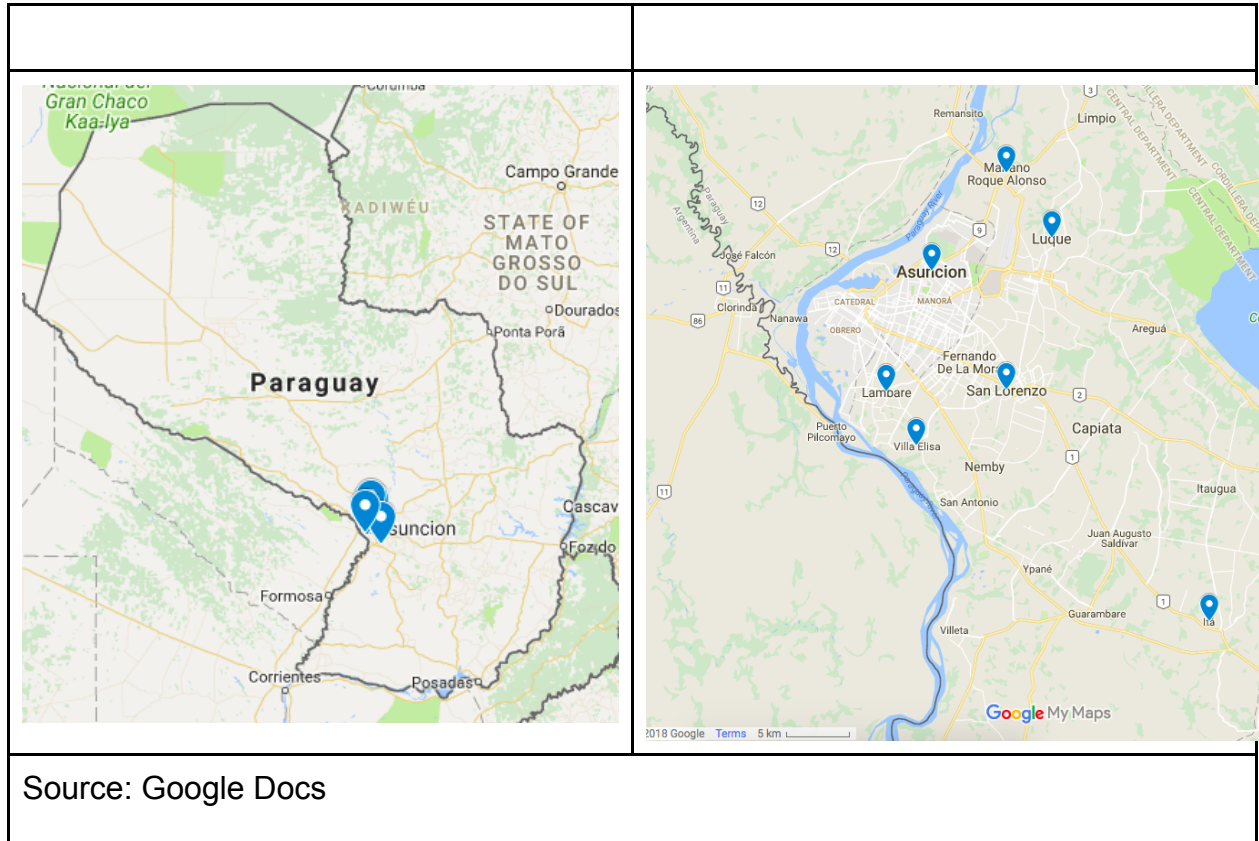
## Appendix

### Appendix A. 50 Multidimensional Poverty Indicators Poverty Stoplight

<b>INCOME &amp; EMPLOYMENT</b>	26. Security
1. Income above Poverty Line	27. Sufficient and Appropriate Clothing
2. Stable Income	<b>EDUCATION &amp; CULTURE</b>
3. Credit	28. Know How to Read and Write
4. Family Savings	29. Children with Schooling up to 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
5. Diversified Source of Income	30. Expertise and Skills to Generate Income
6. Documentation: Identity Card	31. Capacity to Plan and Budget
<b>HEALTH &amp; ENVIRONMENT</b>	32. Communication and Social Capital
7. Access to Drinking Water	33. School Supplies and Books
8. Nearby Health Post	34. Access to Information (Radio & TV)
9. Nutritious Food	35. Entertainment & Recreation
10. Personal Hygiene and Sexual Health	36. Values Cultural Traditions
11. Healthy Teeth and Eyesight	37. Respects other Cultures
12. Vaccines	38. Awareness of Human Rights
13. Garbage Disposal	<b>ORGANIZATION &amp; PARTICIPATION</b>
14. Unpolluted Environment	39. Are Part of a Self-Help Group
15. Insurance	40. Influence on the Public Sector
<b>HOUSING &amp; INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	41. Problem and Conflict-Solving Ability
16. Safe Home	42. Registered Voters & Votes in Elections
17. Sanitary Latrines and Sewage	<b>SELF-AWARENESS &amp; MOTIVATION</b>
18. Electricity	43. Self-Confidence (Self-Esteem)
19. Refrigerator and Other Appliances	44. Awareness of their Needs
20. Separate Bedrooms	45. Moral Conscience
21. Elevated and Ventilated Cook Stove	46. Emotional-Affective Capacity
22. Comfort of the Home	47. Aesthetic Self-Expression, Art and Beauty
23. Regular Means of Transportation	48. Family Violence
24. All-weather access road	49. Entrepreneurship
25. Fixed Line or Cellular Telephone	50. Autonomy & Decision-Making Capabilities

Source: Fundacion Paraguaya, n.d.

## Appendix B. Map of Cities



## Appendix C. Fieldwork Timeline

The process of collecting primary and secondary data will be carried out in seven urban and peri-urban towns in Paraguay. Below, you can find my 12 months fieldwork timetable plan.

	Location	2018								2019				2019-2020
		M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	j	
														May - Sept 2020
FP runs Poverty Stoplight Survey (first round)	Paraguay	√												
Development of Empowerment survey	Paraguay	√												
Pilot Empowerment survey	Paraguay	√												
Run Empowerment survey (first round)	Paraguay		√											
Literature Review of institutional documents	Paraguay				√									
***INTERMISSION-Paternity Leave***	Paraguay													
Enter and analyze data	Paraguay						√	√	√	√				
Construct tentative index, do initial comparison, and write descriptive chapters	Paraguay								√	√	√	√		
Design Focus Group questionnaire	Paraguay				√	√								
Design Micro Narratives Exercise	Paraguay				√	√								
Focus Group with FP clients on power	Paraguay									√	√			
Run Micro Narratives Exercise with FP Clients	Paraguay										√	√		
FP runs Poverty Stoplight Survey (second round)	Paraguay										√	√		
Run Empowerment survey (second round)	Paraguay										√			

Enter and analyze data	UK																			√
Synthesize data, construct index, and outline the analysis and argument	UK																			√
Write thesis	UK																			√