

ACTIVITY 3:

Arenas of power

The idea that power operates in different dimensions and arenas is foundational to this Guide and rooted in political theory and insights from years of social movement-building experience. Many people and organisations have used and adapted this framework to analyse how power affects them and develop strategies to transform power.

Step 1: Introduce the framework

Materials: Handout: *Four arenas of power*

Plenary: Refer to the handout: *What and where is power?* and reiterate key points.

In pairs: Building on the earlier activities about power and powerlessness, brainstorm as many examples of power from your context and social change experience, being sure to include both negative and positive forms. Identify two examples and write them on cards:

One example of power as negative (as control, abuse, coercion).

One example of power as positive (as liberating, creative, transformative).

Plenary: As pairs share their examples, cluster their cards on the floor or wall. Then, as you present the frameworks, draw examples from participants' cards of:

Visible power (making and enforcing the rules); *hidden power* (influencing and setting the agenda); *invisible power* (shaping norms and beliefs); *systemic power* (the deeply embedded logics that define social relationships).

Power over: the oppressive use and abuse of power to exploit, control, dominate, and exclude.

Transformative power (*power within, power with, power to, power for*).

Distribute the handout *The four arenas of power* and facilitate a discussion. Focus on clarifying the frameworks. In conclusion, invite discussion by asking:

How are these arenas of power useful in helping you work out what and who you're up against and where to focus your change work?

How can they be useful in guiding your efforts to build and use your own power to challenge and change injustice?

What questions do the arenas raise that you might explore and clarify when you apply them to your own work and issues or to case studies?

Step 2: Apply the four arenas of power

This framework helps reveal how power is operating and where there are opportunities to expose, contest, and change power in relation to real contexts and issues.

Choose one of three options as the basis for analysing the four arenas of power:

- the historical timeline created in Chapter 2: Naming the Moment
- a case study (three are provided)
- participants' own experiences and issues (note: this can be enriched by the learning from one of the options above first)

Materials: Use several large pieces of paper to map out the arenas of power as groups name them. Alternatively, create a simple grid with a row for each of the four arenas of power and two columns. In the first column, groups note how powerful interests in this specific arena of power contribute to the problem. Leave the second column blank for exploring how movements challenge these dynamics of power.

Option 1: Use the timeline created in Chapter 2: Naming the Moment or do the timeline activity now. Post the timeline on the wall. Look at the whole timeline, or form groups by age and experience to focus on a section of the timeline.

Option 2: Choose one of the case studies or provide your own.

UBUNTU: Rural women mobilise in South Africa

PEKKA: A grassroots women's movement in Indonesia

COPINH: Guardians of the River in Honduras

Read the case study individually or aloud in turns.

Option 3: Handouts or resources related to the group's issues and agendas. Identify a maximum of three issues that your group is working on or care about.

Small groups: For any of the three options:

- Identify a moment when power was challenged. What were the issues or events at the centre of this moment?
- How and where did power play out in relation to the four arenas of power? Who were some of the dominant actors, and what were their interests?
- How has exclusion or violence been reinforced or legitimised in each arena of power?

Visible: making and enforcing the rules

Hidden: influencing and setting the agenda

Invisible: shaping norms and beliefs

Systemic: defining the logic of all structures and relationships

- What social justice strategies or ways of organising did the movements or community groups use to enhance and mobilise their influence to disrupt, resist, challenge, or change power in these arenas? Identify up to three strategies.

Plenary: Consider each of the questions above in turn. Invite one of the small groups to share their thoughts, then ask others to add or build. Small groups take turns to share first. Note key words and 'aha!' moments on flip chart. For variety, invite groups to

present their thoughts in creative ways such as a lively talk show (TV or radio), a three-to-five-minute skit, a story, or a song.

To conclude, ask and discuss:

- Which of the four arenas of power were you able to identify?
- Who and what was in conflict? How did the groups involved try to address injustice or shift power?
- Was the framework useful? What did the arenas of power reveal?