

ACTIVITY 4:

Transformative power in action

The four arenas of power help us unpack the many shapes and forms of domination, coercion, and oppression – or power over – that we face in our lives and activism. The arenas of power are often experienced as negative, but they are always contested. Each arena is a space where we can resist, engage, build, and transform power for positive change. How we source, build, and mobilise our own power, individually and collectively, can be unpacked into different kinds of “transformational power”, as we will explore using the framework here.¹

Materials: The option that the group explored in Activity 2: Arenas of power: timeline, case study, or own experience.

Handout: *Transformative Power*

Facilitator note: Ahead of time, familiarise yourself with the Transformative Power concepts (see handout)

Step 1: Introduce the framework

Individually: Give people some paper or cards. Ask them to think about and write down:

- What sources of power do you draw upon to deal with conflict and challenges in your personal and work life?
- What sources of power do you draw on in your activism?
- What are some of the ways you have used your power to make a change?

In pairs: Discuss the sources and uses of power you each feel and deploy, and the similarities and differences in your experiences. Together, choose one source of power, and create a living statue (with moving parts) or skit that represents it.

Plenary: Each pair presents their living statues or skits, and the group guesses what they mean. Once the group has guessed, invite the presenting group to explain what they were thinking. Record what emerges on a flip chart. Ask at the end if anything is missing from the list of sources of power, and, if needed, add to the list. (You should note to yourself those that fall under power within, with, to, and for).

Synthesise and introduce the concepts of transformative power — ideas developed by women’s rights activists and feminists to describe the different categories of power people use to transform and improve their lives and their societies. Share the Handout: Transformative Power.

With help from the group, cluster the ideas on your list according to power with, within, to, and for. You can ask for other examples.

¹ Adapted from Just Associates, We Rise Toolkit, Sources of Transforming Power, developed by Just Associates and activists in Southern Africa and Mesoamerica

Stress how these forms of power interact and reinforce one another (for example, we often discover our sense of power within and power to in the context of working with others, power with; power for grows out of a deepening sense of the other three as we get clear what it is we want to create and change in the world around us).

- How do these forms of power resonate with our understanding of power? How are they different than power over and the four arenas of power? Anything we might add?
- Reflecting on our experiences, how do we foster power within? Where do we develop power to? How do we build power with? And what gives us a sense of power for over time?
- How do each of these powers contribute to strong movements?

Step 2: Transformative power in action

Small groups: Small groups: Invite each group to look for examples of – or potential for – sources and uses of power that could be transformative from the activity above in Step 1. Ask:

- What kinds of transformative power can you identify? What was the main source of this power? How was this power used? Look for examples of power within, power with, power to, and power for.
- How did these sources of power work together or support each other? How can they be combined to strengthen the power of activists and movements?
- Are there any forms of transformative power not discussed that you would add?

Plenary: Invite each group to share three or four insights or ‘aha!’ moments. Discuss the questions above. Finish by asking and discussing:

- How has transformative power changed or shaped your understanding of power?
- How does transformative power relate to challenging and changing power in the four arenas?
- What potential do you see for building transformative power with others in your own work or context?