

# 1

## GETTING STARTED







**We need imaginative spaces, because we can't build what we can't imagine. Without the ability to imagine something different, we are trapped within the parameters that the system has set for us.**

*- Walidah Imarisha<sup>1</sup>*

A key starting point for this Guide's power journey is to ground ourselves in both who we are and what we want. We take time to envision the future we want to create, as it is the driving logic, the 'why', that shapes our social justice efforts. From experience and evidence, we know that to make systemic change we must build movements – the networks and communities, both physical and virtual, that advance our agenda to make a better world possible for everyone. Within our movements, we can:

Learn, collaborate, and take action together.  
Create a sense of belonging and believing.  
Embody our principles in the ways that we organise and lead.

In order to use the Guide most effectively, it is important that we locate ourselves and our organisations in relation to the issues, power dynamics, politics, and movements of our context. We situate ourselves in a larger ecosystem of social justice to which we want to connect. There are many ways to contribute to change, and it is vital that we each know what we have to offer and how that could complement the work of others.

Because this Guide is at its heart about creating transformational change, it centres questions of power and strategy, looking at them from a variety of angles, and offering practical and conceptual resources for activists and changemakers of all kinds. Here and throughout this Guide, our approach is [Feminist Popular Education](#). As a political methodology, FPE guides people – individually and within communities and organisations – to recognise and share their experience and knowledge, build connections and common purpose with others and activate their collective power for change. Across the Guide, we begin with individual reflection and build toward shared understandings and analysis that focus and inform collective strategies.

### **Safe and brave spaces**

We begin any process by creating a safe and brave space – one that is collectively defined and maintained by the group working together – to enable everyone to bring their 'full selves' (heart, mind, and body) without having to filter what they say. Because the jumping off point for feminist popular education is people's experiences – with power, inequity, and oppression – the process can surface emotion. A safe and brave space is one that honours that emotion, recognising that much untapped power lies in breaking silence and finding common cause with others, and helps the group move toward action. Another aspect of safe space is that our activism can put us at risk – we must make sure that in designing safe spaces we think about this and put in place strategies to mitigate threats. Other

considerations in creating safe and brave space include: the security of the location; collectively created ground rules including on consent for photos and social media sharing; language and other forms of accessibility; the feel, look and comfort of the space; the availability of smaller group breakout areas; and the level of care and trust needed. For more, see We Rise on Creating Safe Space.

The intention of a safe space is to create the conditions for courage – courage to break silences, courage to share life experiences so we can find common ground, courage to seek common purpose with others different than yourself, courage to imagine and act for change. It is the combination of safety and courage in a group that can unleash power for transformative change.

Remember that:

- Participation is optional – anyone can step out any time.
- People should share only what they choose to.
- Difficult issues may emerge, such as experiences of violence, fear, or discrimination, when it's important to pause.

## The Politics of Heart-Mind-Body



**Integrating Heart-Mind-Body into ongoing work at the most basic level means raising consciousness and centring care - sharing simple practices and skills for self-care that do not cost a lot, strengthening community networks, thinking proactively about security and safety planning where necessary to mitigate risk, threats, and violence, and ensuring that women can work together to build strategies and mobilise collectively for the other forms of care.**

*- Shereen Essof<sup>2</sup>*

This Guide engages the question of power and change from a decolonial feminist and movement building perspective. A critical dimension of this approach is the value placed on the many forms of knowledge that come from life experiences and are carried in our hearts, minds, and bodies. Our commitment to what we call “Heart-Mind-Body” reflects a belief that, without such a holistic approach, we will not only miss key insights but also risk creating fragmented strategies that only speak to one part of our lives. The activities in this Guide engage multiple forms of learning in keeping with this political orientation.

Some activities, such as “Rivers of Life” and “Body Mapping”, involve storytelling and deepen people’s understanding of the realities of each other’s lives, an important building block for trust and joint action. They can also surface uncomfortable memories – so be prepared to offer some support in the moment. You might bring the group together to stand or hold hands in solidarity, take time for collective centring and breathwork, or offer other forms of culturally appropriate emotional support. Empathy and care are fundamentally important in creating spaces for learning. And in case more is needed, you may want to have links to resources and contacts with support networks such as counselling, medical, and legal services.

**Theme 1: Starting with Ourselves**

How can we create knowledge together from our experience and the information we gather around us? How do we integrate what we know in our hearts, minds, and bodies? How have our lived experiences shaped who we are as activists and change makers, beyond our formal education? And how can greater critical awareness about how what we learned has shaped us, enable us to engage with others in more intentional, liberated, and liberating ways?

**Theme 2: Reimagining the Future**

What is the future we dream of and work toward? What values and beliefs guide our ways of working? How will we move toward the future?

**Theme 3: Roadmaps to Change**

As we imagine the path toward our vision, what hurdles and twists do we foresee? What are our assumptions about how change happens and how people change? How do we understand movements and movement building?

**Theme 4: Who are 'We'?**

How do we situate ourselves in the larger ecosystem of movements for justice? What do we stand for? What do we bring and offer? Where do we have access and relationships, and where not?

## Theme 1: Starting with Ourselves

Open the session with an activity to encourage people to bring their whole selves and their stories into the room. “How do we know what we know?” and “Rivers of Life” are activities that invite each person to open up, connect, understand each other’s contexts, and validate broader sources of knowledge and power. Use these or other activities as a jumping off point to get to know each other and build trust.

### ACTIVITY 1:

#### How do we know what we know?

We all learn in different ways. In this activity, we think about our formal education and the various ways we have learned through life experience. We introduce how feminist popular education can contribute to liberating forms of learning.

**Materials:** Coloured markers, sticky notes or coloured cards, flipchart paper, tape, copies of handout: *Listening beyond words*

**Plenary:** Introduce the activity. Read *Listening beyond words* aloud and then invite people to brainstorm answers.

- What did the organisers fail to see in this case? Why?
- What assumptions lay behind their decisions?
- How does such a lack of awareness impact power dynamics within the group? And externally?
- What was learned in the story? Was anything unlearned?

The framework reveals how power is operating and where opportunities exist to expose, contest, and change power in relation to real contexts and issues.

Reflect on different ways of learning and knowing. We all learn in different ways – not only with our minds but also with our hearts and bodies. Some learn through reading and some through doing, while others are visual learners. Feminist popular education encourages us to critically question what we have learned and the underlying assumptions we carry, and to integrate our different ways of knowing the world.

Next, distribute post-its or cards and sheets of flipchart paper. Explain that the next step is for personal reflection and won’t be shared with the group.

**Individually:** Draw the outline of a person on your sheet. Ask yourself:

- What are the different ways of learning in all parts of my life?
- Which do I value most now and why? Anything I have had to “unlearn” or question?
- What conditions enable me to learn best?

Write your thoughts on post-its or cards. Place each one on the heart, mind, or part of the body on your outline.

**Small groups:** Each of four small groups focuses on a different question. Groups select a moderator, a person to take notes, and a person to share in plenary.

- Group 1: Did our formal education take our lived experience into account?
- Group 2: How did our formal education portray the value and history of our communities, country, and the world?
- Group 3: What values and beliefs were reinforced by our formal education, and what values and beliefs were discounted?
- Group 4: What does our formal education say about who teaches, who has knowledge, and who learns?

**Plenary:** Groups take turns to share their thoughts. Invite discussion about formal education, drawing out the ways in which it can discount our lived experiences, distort history, reflect patriarchal and racist beliefs, and replicate colonial and capitalist values. Ask:

- What assumptions lay under the surface about who has knowledge, who doesn't, whose knowledge counts, and what knowledge is and what it isn't?
- How do these assumptions relate to and reinforce inequities of power and privilege?
- What are the implications of this kind of formal education (sometimes called banking education for 'depositing' knowledge in people's minds) for those seeking liberation from oppression?
- How can we educate ourselves in ways that are liberating?

Note key points on flipchart. Point out that, without bringing consciousness in this way to what we "know" and why we know it (particularly as that is shaped by our identity – class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc – and how that positions us in the world), we may easily replicate power inequities and other oppressive dynamics within our communities, organisations, and movements. (We will go into this more fully in Chapter 4.) To close, introduce or remind the group about feminist popular education, particularly its focus on learning and unlearning in a way that catalyses change and liberation. Connect ideas on the flip chart summary to ways that feminist popular education as a political practice is liberating.

## Listening beyond words

*An experience shared by Patricia Ardón, JASS*

Many years ago, when I was very young, I worked in an organisation that was introducing household taps (faucets) for drinking water for rural and Indigenous communities. To raise awareness and encourage community participation, the organisation used popular education processes. With the community members, the organisation chose a specific community in which to introduce this scheme for potable water. Male and female promoters from this community participated in the process.



*María Patricia Ardón Quezada*

We held a series of meetings with leaders and with community members via assemblies. As in the past — and as still happens in many communities — men dominated the

conversation. Women rarely spoke, except when specific women's spaces were created, which was infrequent at the time. Both women and men, albeit fewer women than men, also conducted community surveys. Finally, after months of work, it was decided that conditions were ripe for introducing household faucets. The premise was that putting faucets in the houses would benefit the women, as this would lessen their workload, since they had to walk to the public water collection tank — or sometimes even to the river — to collect water. At that time, the concept of gender-differentiated impacts was practically unknown to most people, but we had already gone through some basic training and sensitization on the subject.

When the faucets were installed, our great surprise was that most of the women were unhappy with this modality. Upon further investigation, we realized that the women felt they had lost the only space where they could socialize with each other, talk about what was happening in their lives, what they were going through with their partners, their joys and sorrows, their children, and their families. The public water collection tank — and sometimes the river — were their only places of coexistence and exchange. And it was also the only space — or one of the very few spaces — where they had the possibility of mingling beyond the control of their male partners. And of course, most of the men were happy that they did not leave their homes because (among other reasons) when they did go out, they found out about things like the men's "infidelities."

This experience impressed me profoundly and has stayed with me. It led me to reflect more deeply not only on how we sometimes get carried away by appearances or by what may be beneficial (or not) for other groups of people, but also on the importance of investigating what is behind what we are seeing and hearing — beyond the words themselves — especially in the lives of women. Furthermore, it has helped me to reflect on the different ways we learn — some of us learn more through concrete experience or observation; others learn more through study, or in many other ways.

Find out more about [Feminist Popular Education](#).

## ACTIVITY 2:

### Rivers of Life

**Materials:** Large pieces of paper (A3 or half of flip chart) and coloured markers for each person.

**Plenary:** Introduce the activity. Invite people to draw a river to show the key moments that have shaped your lives and the pivotal experiences (positive or negative) that have awakened you to injustice, inequality, power, or liberation.

**Individually:** Think about the experiences that have shaped your life and made you who you are. Draw a river that traces your life journey. Zoom in on four or five key moments of awakening about oppression, injustice, inequality, power, struggle, or liberation.



These experiences may have been difficult or joy-filled; they may have been individual or collective. Show these pivotal moments either along the river itself (for example, as streams flowing into it, bends, rapids, waterfalls, dams, swamps, or reflective pools) or along the shore (for example, people, experiences, conflicts, bridges, turning points). Use images, colours, and as few words as possible.

**Small groups** – or if time allows in plenary: Take five-minute turns to show and discuss your river. Only share what you want to and hold each other's words in confidence.

- What was it about each experience that was so important?
- How did these experiences impact and change you?
- How have they shaped who you are today?
- What insights, values, and visions do you bring from these experiences to this collective?
- Are there any particular cultural symbols that represent this for you?

Agree on moments or experiences that you found in common to share with the larger group.

**Plenary:** Each group briefly shares insights or common experiences. You can keep details confidential.

- What did you learn about yourself in this activity?
- Did you have any 'aha' moments listening to other people's stories? (Don't give details of someone else's story – only your own moment.)

As a facilitator, draw out the ways in which the heart, mind, and body all shape our experience, memory, and knowledge.

- How do these experiences in our hearts, minds, and bodies affect our leadership and change work now?
- How do they affect our wellbeing, spirit, and energy?
- What insights can we draw from this about our particular contexts and histories?

Repeat or continue this exercise if you like, to enable people to show where their rivers are heading, for example by drawing many streams joining together towards the ocean or diverging streams forming a delta with many ways forward.





## Theme 2: Imagining the Future We Want



How about we begin to exercise the never-proclaimed right to dream?  
How about we rave for a moment?

- Eduardo Galeano<sup>3</sup>

What is the world we want to bring into being? Let's imagine a world without systemic inequities, injustices, and violence. Let's name the values and ways of being that will take us there. What is our vision? These are not frivolous questions. If we take our vision seriously, it becomes a guiding star, helping us discern and make strategic choices that move us closer to the deeper change we seek. A visioning process can embolden us to ask more fundamental questions about the conditions in which we are living and why things are the way they are. Activating our radical imagination can open up a sense of possibility and invite more interesting proposals that upend power and go beyond conventional statements of vision and mission.



We need... a new vision, a new definition of power and leadership. We must go away from the old model and toward one of creative cooperation on our small and threatened planet.... toward a sane and sustainable culture. A culture of soul. A culture that values life more than war. People more than profits. And hope more than despair.

- Johnnetta Cole<sup>4</sup>



Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly."

- Langston Hughes<sup>5</sup>



Every time we try to imagine a world without prisons, a world without oppression, a world without war, without borders, that is science fiction, because we've never seen that world. But we need imaginative spaces, because we can't build what we can't imagine. Without the ability to imagine something different, we are trapped within the parameters that the system has set for us."

- Walidah Imarisha<sup>6</sup>

## Dreaming the Future

Any process to spark new ways of seeing, thinking, and acting needs to take us beyond our usual thought processes to touch our emotions, beliefs, longings, and dreams. These drew us to this work in the first place and will animate new thinking, approaches, and ever stronger relationships. Here we explore our dreams and collective visions for the future.

**Materials:** Flip charts, post-its or cards of four different colours, markers, tape, letter-size paper, different coloured paper and tissue paper, written instructions, and relevant quotes.

**Plenary:** Read the quotes aloud to draw people from day-to-day thinking into a mode of imagining. While some were written in particular moments such as the beginning of the COVID pandemic, they speak to any crisis that triggers the necessity of rethinking and imagining other ways of being. Feel free to use quotes from your context to invite reflections on dreams of a better future.

Our dreams have been important in inspiring change and sustaining hope and community. The simple process of envisioning a better future is a critical action in itself. As we confront the violent systems around us:

- What do we centre in our work?
- How do we shape our vision and stay true to our values?
- What stars guide us along the way to making our dreams a reality?

### Step 1: Dreaming

**Individually:** In order to invite a creative mindset, take a walk outdoors and really pay attention to what you see, smell, and hear; or listen to music or sing; or choose another activity that takes you out of the strictly rational brain. Allow yourself to visualize your desired future.

- What is the future you dream about?
- Where are you? Who are you with?
- What are you and people around you doing?
- What is the environment like? What do you see? What colours? What sounds? What smells?
- How are you feeling?

In two to three words, fill the gaps on colour-coded post-its, one colour per phrase:

I have a dream of a future where everyone will \_\_\_\_\_ (colour 1), where no one will \_\_\_\_\_ (colour 2), and where the land and environment will \_\_\_\_\_ (colour 3). One idea or belief that feeds my dream and my work toward it is \_\_\_\_\_ (colour 4).

Using markers, pencils, coloured crayons, and/or collage, create a “quilt square” – an image on letter-size paper (of different colours, if possible) – to represent the future you have imagined.

**Plenary:** Each person shares their image, and these are placed one-by-one together on a

wall, floor, or table to make a quilt. In turn, each person reads their colour-coded dream statements and idea or belief. As they read, group the statements on a wall into similar themes and open a short discussion.

- What do these different images and cards say to us about our visions for the future?
- What are the ways we want our lives and the world to change?
- Do you see common sources of hope? How can we use these sources of hope and possibility in our organizing and change-making work?
- What brings us together? What are some of the differences?
- What do they say about our guiding values and purpose, what we stand for?
- What do they say about our hearts and feelings?

## Step 2: Reimagined futures

Our individual dreams inspire us and others but to make change we must pool our dreams and collectively reimagine the future. Imagine that you've teleported to 2060, a time when a better world has arrived.

Options that might invite inspiration:

Watch the video: [Message from the Future](#)

Read selections from [In a Time Not So Far Away](#)

Watch a video from the Movement for Black Lives: [Black Futures – Ode to Freedom Summer](#)

Alternatively, find examples in other languages or from other contexts.

**Small groups:** To show a radically reimagined world, create a five-minute role play, make a short video on a phone, or describe four scenarios that allow others to see what you see.

- What do we see?
- How do we feel?
- What are people doing differently? For economic well-being? For political and social problem-solving?
- How are communities organised?
- How do people relate to their environment?

**Plenary:** Each group presents their vision of the future. Discuss the futures you imagine. How do they connect to your dreams from Step 1?

## Step 3: How will we get there?

**Plenary:** Re-read the Arundhati Roy quote. Repeat the last phrase: "We can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it".

Display a new flip chart or screen entitled "Travelling to the Reimagined Future" with two columns headed "In order to get to this vision, what will I take? and what will I leave behind?"

**Individually:** Write two or three post-its in answer to each question and post them in the columns.

**Plenary:** Invite people to share what they posted and discuss what we're leaving behind and what we're taking with us. What do we learn about our visions looking at these lists?

#### Step 4: Values, principles, and ways of working

Building on the previous discussion, identify the core values, principles, and ways of working – both individual and collective – that will guide us toward our imagined future.

**Individually:** On two stickies, write:

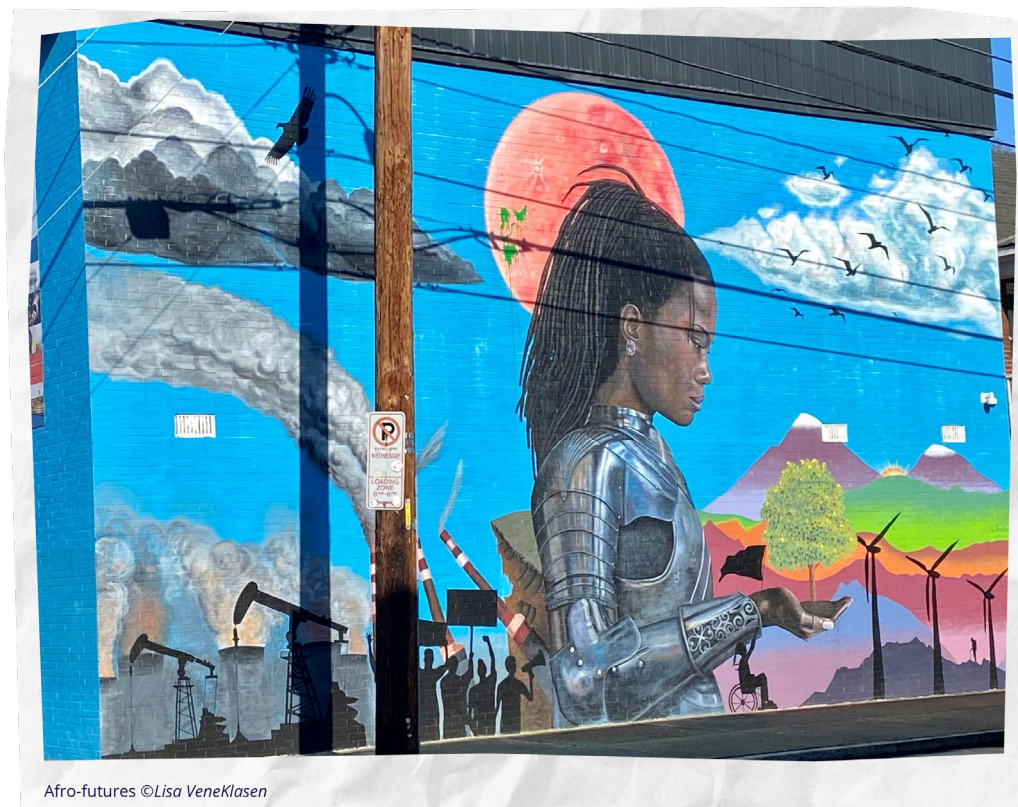
One important value or principle that will be essential for living our visions.

One way of working or leading, or one practice that must change to enable us to realise these values.

**Plenary:** Cluster responses and invite discussion.

- What do we find in common?
- Are there any notable differences?

Summarise the discussion and read out the quotes from Johnetta Cole and Langston Hughes (see Theme 2).



Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one [Covid] is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

- Arundhati Roy<sup>7</sup>



## ACTIVITY 4:

### Bringing visions to life

#### Step 1: Visions for social change that can inspire us

If our vision feels stale or too limited, or if we don't have one, we can gain inspiration from looking at those of others. You may want to explore a selection of bold visions from *Visions and values in action*.

**Plenary:** Use these examples or brainstorm examples of other organisations or movements – past or present – whose vision, values, and ways of working inspire you.

Ask:

- What is appealing about how they lay out their vision and how they live their values in their activism and leadership?
- What are some of the challenges of putting values and principles into practice?

#### Step 2: Bringing visions to life

Here, we contrast the what and the how to judge how our values, principles, and ways of working align with our vision. Use Option 1 if people are all from the same organization, or if they can be grouped by organization. Use Option 2 if people are mostly from different organisations or as a follow-up to Option 1.

#### Option 1: Same organisations

**Small groups:** What is your organisation's vision? This may be an existing vision statement, or you may need to take some time as a group to write down the vision as you all understand it.

- How do you feel about your organisation's vision?
- Could the vision be improved or stretched? If yes, what would you change?
- Does the vision reflect the values, principles, and ways of working you identified?
- If yes, how?
- If not, how could your values, principles, and ways of working bring the vision to life? Or how could the vision be changed to better reflect your values and ways of working?

Pick three insights to share in plenary.

**Plenary:** Groups share insights.

- What does this tell us about the connection between our visions and our ways of working?
- What needs to change to align our practices with our visions?
- Where do we need to stretch or challenge ourselves?
- Is it about the what or the how or both?

The purpose of this discussion is not to find answers, right or wrong, or to decide now what needs to change, but to stimulate thinking. Remind people that they will return to these questions later, enriched with other perspectives.

You could go back to the inspiring organisations or movements named in Step 1. How did they align their what with their how?

## Option 2: different organisations

Go back to the inspiring organisations or movements named in Step 1, or name examples familiar to the group, or draw on the handout. Each small group discusses a different organization or movement.

**Small groups:** For the organisation or movement you are looking at:

- What is the vision? Find their vision statement or describe your understanding of it.
- How do you feel about this vision?
- What do you think are or were their core values, principles, and ways of working?
- Does the vision reflect these values, principles, and ways of working?
- If yes, how?
- If not, what values, principles, and ways of working could help bring the vision to life? Or how could the vision be changed to better embody values, principles, and ways of working?

Pick a reporter and three insights to share in plenary.

**Plenary:** Groups share insights.

- How does looking at these visions make you feel? What questions or reflections do they surface for you and for your own work?
- What does this tell us about the connection between an organisation or movement's vision and its ways of working?
- What challenges were involved, if any, in aligning vision with principles, purpose with practice – the what and the how?

### Vision and values in action

What people believe to be valuable guides their actions, whether these values are unspoken and unacknowledged or spelled out clearly. When people express their values and weave them together, they are creating a coherent vision or philosophy. With a shared vision, a movement or collective can advance together.

Here are five examples of deeply considered and coherent visions to guide short- and long-term strategies and action. Find, share, and discuss examples from your own context.

### Principles of Earth Democracy

Vandana Shiva is described as “an Indian scholar, environmental activist, food sovereignty advocate, ecofeminist, and anti-globalization author”. This set of principles, summarised from her books, presents an overall philosophy and vision as a rich basis for activism.<sup>8</sup>

#### 1. *Ecological democracy – democracy of all life*

We are all members of the Earth community. We all have the duty to protect the rights and welfare of all species and all people. No humans have the right to encroach on the ecological space of other species and other people, or treat them with cruelty and violence.

2. *Intrinsic worth of all species and peoples*

All species, humans, and cultures have intrinsic worth. They are subjects, not objects of manipulation or ownership. No humans have the right to own other species, other people, or the knowledge of other cultures through patents and other intellectual property rights.

3. *Diversity in nature and culture*

Defending biological and cultural diversity is a duty of all people. Diversity is an end in itself, a value, a source of richness both material and cultural.

4. *Natural rights to sustenance*

All members of the Earth Community including all humans have the right to food and water, to safe and clean habitat, to security of ecological space. These rights are natural rights, they are birthrights and are best protected through community rights and commons. They are not given by states or corporations, nor can they be extinguished by state or corporate action, through privatisation or monopoly control.

5. *Earth economy is based on economic democracy and living economy*

Earth democracy is based on economic democracy. Economic systems in Earth Democracy protect ecosystems and their integrity, they protect people's livelihoods and provide basic needs to all. In the earth economy there are no disposable or dispensable species or people. The earth economy is a living economy for the benefit of the common good.

6. *Living economies are built on local economies*

Conservation of the earth's resources and creation of sustainable and satisfying livelihoods is most caringly, creatively, and efficiently and equitably achieved at the local level. Localisation of economics is a social and ecological imperative. Only goods and services that cannot be produced locally, using local resources and local knowledge, should be produced non-locally and traded long distance.

7. *Living democracy*

Earth democracy is based on local living democracy with local communities – organised on principles of inclusion and diversity and ecological and social responsibility – as the highest authority on decisions related to the environment and natural resources and to the sustenance and livelihoods of people. Authority is delegated to more distant levels of governance on the principle of subsidiarity. Earth democracy is living democracy.

8. *Living knowledge*

Earth democracy is based on earth-centred and community-centred knowledge systems. Living knowledge is knowledge that maintains and renews living processes and contributes to health of the planet and people. It is also living knowledge in that it is embedded in nature and society, is not abstract, reductionist, or anti-life. Living knowledge is a commons, it belongs collectively to communities that create it and keep it alive. All humans have a duty to share knowledge. No person or corporation has a right to enclose, monopolise, patent, or exclusively own as intellectual property living knowledge.

9. *Balancing rights with responsibility*

In earth democracy, rights are derived from and balanced with responsibility. Those who bear the consequences of decisions and actions are the decision makers.

10. *Globalizing peace, care, and compassion*

Earth democracy connects people in circles of care, cooperation, and compassion instead of dividing them through competition and conflict. Earth democracy globalises compassion, not greed, and peace, not war.

## **The Care Collective**

This vision and manifesto circulated widely when ‘care’ emerged as a central political agenda in 2020 during the Covid pandemic. This short version gives a sense of the principles and practice at its core.<sup>9</sup>

1. *Interdependence*: To imagine a world organised around care, we must begin by recognising the myriad ways in which our survival is always contingent on others. A caring politics must first and foremost acknowledge our interdependence alongside the ambivalence and anxiety these connections routinely generate. Recognising our needs both to give and receive care not only provides us with a sense of our common humanity, but also enables us to confront our shared fears of human frailty rather than project them onto others.
2. *Caring kinships*: The traditional nuclear family with the mother at its centre still provides the dominant prototype for care and kinship... Yet it is only by proliferating our circles of care – in the first instance by expanding our notion of kinship – that we can achieve the psychic infrastructures necessary for building a caring society that has universal care as its foundation. Diverse forms of care between all human and non-human creatures need to be recognised and valued. This is what we call ‘an ethics of promiscuous care’. Promiscuous care means caring more and in ways that remain experimental and extensive by current standards. It means multiplying who we care for and how.
3. *Caring communities*: Questions of care are not just bound up with the intimacy of very close relationships. They are also shaped in the localities we inhabit and move through: in local communities, neighbourhoods, libraries, schools, and parks, in our social networks, and our group belongings. But the deliberate rolling back of public welfare provision [where this exists at all], replaced by global corporate commodity chains, have generated profoundly unhealthy community contexts for care.

Communities that care stop the hoarding of resources by the few. Instead, caring communities need to prioritise the commons. Communities based on care ensure the creation of collective public spaces as well as objects: they encourage a sharing infrastructure. This means reversing the compulsion of neoliberalism to privatise everything.



## Seven Principles of Zapatismo

This example comes from a resistance movement in Chiapas state in Mexico in 1994 and draws on the deeper history of the ancestors to guide community-building.<sup>10</sup>

The group primarily consisted of Indigenous tribes with their own customs including Ch'ol, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tojolobal, Mam, and Zoque. The event made headlines worldwide and sparked a movement for Indigenous rights, autonomy, and social change. The Zapatista Revolution's uprising, which occurred on the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect. Zapatistas, as they are commonly known, emerged from decades of organizing among Indigenous peoples to address the systemic issues of poverty, discrimination, and lack of representation faced by Indigenous communities in Mexico.

The Zapatistas' uprising was a call to action for marginalized communities worldwide and continues to inspire movements for Indigenous rights and social change. Since 1994, the Zapatistas have focused on building autonomous communities that are centred around their Indigenous traditions while seeking to create 'Un Mundo Donde Quepan Muchos Mundos' ('A World Where Many Worlds Fit'), emphasising the dignity of 'others,' belonging, and common struggle, as well as the importance of laughter, dancing, and nourishing children.

1. *Obedecer y No Mandar (to obey, not command)*  
Execute the will of the people, while holding a position of leadership. In Zapatista autonomous communities, leadership positions are short-lived. This reflects the need for leaders to obey the collective desires of the community rather than command them from a position of power.
2. *Proponer y No Imponer (to propose, not impose)*  
Humility is a key part of life for the Zapatistas and aligns with their practice of debate and self-reflection, and a culture of proposing a path forward and not imposing one.
3. *Representar y No Suplantar (to represent, not supplant)*  
Before the coloniser arrived, Indigenous people governed themselves. Self-governance for the Zapatistas, grounded in the collective trust of the community to represent what the community wants.
4. *Convencer y No Vencer (to convince, not conquer)*  
Zapatistas practise dialogue and assembly, which require logical argument, reflection, consideration of many viewpoints, and open discussion.
5. *Construir y No Destruir (to construct, not destroy)*  
The ethic of anti-destruction and an end to exploitation is a practice in creating the institutions and the world that we want, in relationship to humans and the land.

6. *Servir y No Servirse (to serve others, not serve oneself)*

The Zapatista slogan, 'Para todos todo, para nosotros nada' (Everything for Everyone, Nothing for Ourselves), is at the core of this principle of humility. Every Zapatista must find a balance in serving others for the collective while taking care of their individual family work.

7. *Bajar y No Subir (to work from below, not seek to rise)*

In Zapatista communities, 'trabajo colectivo' (collective work) is a way of life. This aligns with the mentality of working at the grassroots level for the benefit of your community.

### **Climate Justice Charter Movement**

This is a South African alliance of progressive civil society, faith communities, labour movements, environmental/climate justice and water sectors, formed to encourage a re-alignment of climate justice forces.<sup>11</sup> Their principles and "systemic alternatives for transformative change" define the future they see and how they hope to get there. Their charter provides a guide to specific short-term demands and tactics as well as narratives and long-term strategy. Below are some excerpts.

### **Principles for deep just transitions**

Every community, village, town, city, and workplace must advance the deep just transition to ensure socio-ecological transformation. The following principles shall guide the alternatives, plans, and processes towards a deep just transition in our society.

1. *Climate justice:* Those least responsible must not be harmed or carry the cost of climate impacts. Hence the needs of workers, the poor, the landless, people with disabilities, grassroots women, children, and vulnerable communities have to be at the centre of the deep just transition. The benefits of socio-ecological transformation must be shared equally.
2. *Social justice:* Climate justice is social justice. Confront all forms of discrimination and oppression as it relates to race, class, gender, sex, and age, to secure climate and social justice.
3. *Eco-centric living:* Live simply, slowly, and consciously, in an eco-centric way, which recognises the sanctity of all life forms and our inter-connections and enables an ethics of respect and care.
4. *Participatory democracy:* All climate and deep just transition policies must be informed by the voices, consent, and needs of all people, especially those facing harm.
5. *Socialised ownership:* In workplaces and communities, people's power must express itself through democratic control and ownership, including through democratic public utilities, cooperatives, commoning, communal ownership, and participatory planning, including participatory budgeting in towns and cities to ensure collective management of the life enabling commons and systems.

6. *International solidarity*: Everyone's struggle is a shared struggle to sustain life. In the context of worsening climate shocks, international solidarity is central to the deep just transition as it serves to unite all who are struggling for emancipation and for a post carbon world.
7. *Decoloniality*: Colonial, neo-colonial, and imperial domination are driving us towards extinction. This is based on the worship of extractivism, technology, finance, violence, and markets. We will actively delink from this system as we affirm an emancipatory relationship between humans and with non-human nature rooted in our history, culture, knowledge, and the wider struggle of the oppressed on planet earth.
8. *Intergenerational justice*: Care for our planetary commons and ecosystems is crucial for intergenerational justice and to secure a future for our children, youth, and those not yet born.



I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>12</sup>

## Theme 3: Roadmaps to Change



It is not enough to open the door to the rooms of power.  
We have to get inside and rearrange the furniture!

- Gertrude Mongella<sup>13</sup>

The way we live into our vision requires a clear sense of our values and purpose but also clarity about our approach to change. What do we assume to be true about how change happens?

Change is often assumed to follow a linear, causal pathway from the actions we take, to the outputs of these actions, to outcomes and impacts.

Change is messy. It's not a straight path but rather a network of roads, travelled by many, and filled with potholes, pitfalls, and unexpected diversions. We set forth to overcome the destructive dynamics of patriarchy, racism, capitalism, colonialism, ageism, ableism, classism, homophobia and more, knowing that the road can be winding and dangerous.

- How do we together create these roads to ensure we get where we want to go?
- What can we contribute to the enabling conditions for change?
- How does this complement what others are doing, on the roads they are following?
- Who and what do we bring along to help us get to our destination?
- How will we overcome the many obstacles along the way?



Traveler, there is no path, The path is made by walking".

- Antonio Machado, Spanish poet.<sup>14</sup>



## ACTIVITY 5:

### How change happens

We look at our experiences in movements for change (or at one of the case studies in this guide) and draw out our assumptions about how change happens, and how our own efforts contribute to the process of resisting, shifting, and building power. We will revisit and deepen these questions throughout the Guide, particularly in Chapter 6: Power and Strategy.

#### Step 1: What do we assume about how change happens?

**Plenary:** Using the Antonio Machado quote for inspiration, we can reflect on some of our assumptions about the change process – which is certainly not as linear, causal, or predictable as some planning frameworks indicate. Think about a change process led by movements in your context (or refer to one of the case studies in this guide). What do you observe about what makes change possible and what some of the important ingredients are? Consider these questions:

- Who or what creates the ‘enabling conditions’ – or lays the groundwork for social change to happen?
- Which different actors and organized groups contribute to the change process?
- How do different groups’ actions complement each other? Are there tensions?
- What can we learn from this reflection about the ingredients and actions that might be needed to advance our vision and agenda?
- Will our change efforts benefit from complementary strategies? Might there be conflict with other actors? And if yes, who? Where? Why?

**Small groups:** Each group takes a different question from this list (or other questions that arise in discussion) and generates three or four responses. What assumptions can you make about how social change happens?

**Plenary:** Small groups share their key thoughts. Draw out highlights from each one and open up to further discussion.

Share the quote Naming the Moment, inspired by Latin American experiences of struggle. Invite someone to read it aloud. Ask:

- What are the key assumptions in Naming the Moment?
- How do they enrich or challenge your thinking?
- What do you feel is the most important insight about power? About how change happens?
- What questions does it raise for you and your organization?



## Naming the moment

"When we do this analysis, we assume that ...

... our social situation is filled with tensions between social groups and within them.

... history is made as these groups come into conflict and resolve conflict.

... some groups have power and privilege at the expense of other groups.

... this oppression is unjust and we must stop it.

... if we want to participate actively in history, we must understand the present as well as the past.

... we can learn to interpret history, evaluate past actions, judge present situations, and project the future.

... because things are always changing, we must continually clarify what we are working for.

... to be effective, we must assess the strengths and weaknesses of our own group and those working with and against us.

... at any moment there is a particular interrelationship of economic, political, and ideological forces.

... these power relationships shift from one moment to another.

... when we plan actions, our strategy and tactics must take into account these forces and relationships.

... we can find the free space that this particular moment offers.

... we can identify and seize the moment for change."

Extract from Naming the moment, Deborah Barndt<sup>15</sup>

## How does change happen?

Common assumptions in the NGO world are that policy drives change, that information changes minds, and that change is a straight line. But history and our own experiences give us plenty of examples to show that policy and information matter but politics, power, and mindsets are much more complex than that. Rather than a steady, linear progression toward justice and rights, it is clear that change always generates conflict and that struggle takes on new contours as contexts and power shifts.

This Guide uses a set of case studies that incorporate a broad array of strategies, both short and long term, that build power and leadership for communities and movements while advancing change at multiple levels. The case studies illuminate the critical importance of organising and movements in enabling people to resist oppressive forms of power, demand democratic and responsive governance, protect themselves from backlash and repression, create solutions and sustain the advances they make. Ultimately, creating change is about changing the balance of power through the organised efforts and strategic action of people over time.



"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

- An African proverb

## Defining movements and movement-building

In this Guide, we assume that movements and movement building are central to change. But these terms are often overused and misused. ‘Movement’ is used to describe everything from a handful of NGOs in a global policy process to a street mobilisation or an online campaign around a hashtag. All of these things may have elements of movements and movement building. We need to be precise about our definitions so that we are clear about our approach to change.

Movements and movement building	
What Is a Movement?	What is movement-building?
<p><b>Clusters of NGOs do not make movements. A movement has:</b></p> <p>A clear vision, values, broad agenda and narrative about the problem and solution</p> <hr/> <p>Broad membership and active constituency base and intentional strategies to always broaden more</p> <hr/> <p>Some degree of organization; formal and informal linkages and alignment</p> <hr/> <p>Diverse leadership and opportunities to lead, represent, decide, division of labour</p> <hr/> <p>Multiple forms of knowledge and information valued</p> <hr/> <p>Leadership and groups closest to problems “frontline” in decisive role</p> <hr/> <p>Proactive and reactive joint and aligned actions in pursuit of common goals;</p> <hr/> <p>Continuity over time adjusting to moment/ context</p> <hr/> <p>Activities that combine <i>extra-institutional</i> (marches, protests, organizing, gatherings), <i>institutional</i> (advocacy &amp; lobbying), <i>virtual</i> (digital organizing and action) and <i>in-person</i>.</p>	<p>Organizing and bringing diverse communities, people and groups together in alliances around common cause and a long-term vision and agenda for transformation</p> <hr/> <p>Dialogue and spaces to refresh political analysis and strengthen shared leadership and relationships that value lived experience and introduce new knowledge</p> <hr/> <p>Valuing and strengthening multiple types of leaders, division of labor and flexible linkages and core principles facilitate joint action; mechanisms for internal negotiation and accountability</p> <hr/> <p>Share resources, voice, roles and leadership of the most affected by injustice at the heart of the movement and ensuring collective safety of all</p>

JASS’ [Feminist Movement-Builders Dictionary \(2012\)](#).



A movement is a set of people with a shared experience of injustice, who organise themselves to build their collective power and leadership, develop a shared agenda for change, which they pursue through collective action, with some continuity over time. ... Movements are always about challenging power structures. ... Movements are built by creating spaces where people can come together to think and speak radical thoughts, and plan radical deeds to change their reality.

- Srilatha Batliwala<sup>16</sup>

Social justice movements are formed and driven by the power of multiple people and organisations brought together by their common problems and different struggles – from racial, gender, and climate justice to women’s, labour, and indigenous people’s rights. Movements weave the voices and concerns of many players into an ever wider and deeper force for change. Often catalysed by a pivotal event or an inspiring figure, movements are many years in the making through the often invisible organising among communities and organisations. We may not witness that invisible organising until a pivotal event occurs. That was the case in the USA with the Movement for Black Lives. The murder of George Floyd in 2020 didn’t create the movement, but it mobilised and amplified it.

In finding common ground and purpose, movements can develop strategies that align with their desire to challenge the systemic power dynamics at the core of oppression and violence. Operating under a broad and overarching vision and agenda, some movements often function loosely, without clear coordination. In such instances, certain groups serve as catalytic hubs that generate ideas and actions, motivating other, more dispersed groups to join. In other configurations, one or two organisations initiate actions that generate a movement, are recognised as its primary leaders, and establish clearer structures of participation and coordination.

**Feminist Movement Building**

Building feminist movements	Feminist movement building
Means organising and mobilising women and LGBTQI+ communities around gender justice, equality, and women’s rights.	On the other hand, involves integrating gender justice and equality and decolonial, feminist perspectives into a range of social justice agendas with different allies. Feminist movement building is both a means to an end and an end in itself.

Understanding power and developing political consciousness are at the heart of feminist movement building. As people build their own analysis of the economic, political, and social dynamics that shape their lives and contexts, they are able to identify shared problems and needs.

This process is the foundation of organising for collective power by helping transform practical needs – clean water, protection from violence, access to land – into a shared commitment that sparks and sustains movements for change.



## ACTIVITY 6:

### What do we mean by 'movements'?

**Materials:** paper and markers, handout: *Defining movements and movement-building*

**Plenary:** Introduce the activity and invite people to brainstorm:

- What is the first word that comes to mind when I say 'social justice movement'?

Note responses on a flip chart.

Share and discuss the quote from Srilatha Batliwala as a kick start and/or the handout: Movement story: *Treatment Action Campaign*.

Small groups: Discuss:

- In your experience, what is a social movement?
- How are social movements organised? How do they come together?

List five key elements of movement building on a flip chart.

**Individually:** Make a drawing that reflects what a social movement means to you.

**Plenary:** Each group posts their drawings on a wall and, after a brief gallery walk, groups read out their five points. Together, discuss what you've heard and create working definitions of 'a movement' and 'movement building'.

You might also ask:

- What are the features of different kinds of movements? Can you think of examples?
- How do movements operate? What are some key characteristics?
- What are some of the methods of organising, leadership, and decision-making?
- What formal or informal groups, alliances, or coalitions are movements made up of?
- And what do movements contribute to larger eco-systems of change?

Explore differences of opinion and areas of agreement.

Share the handout *Movements and movement building* for individuals to read to themselves or for a volunteer to read aloud. Then facilitate a plenary discussion.

- How do these definitions and stages enrich or contrast from our own definitions?
- How does this information help us understand movements that are active in our contexts and their contributions to change efforts?
- What is distinct or different about feminist movement building?
- How does our understanding of movements shape our ideas for how change happens?



### **A movement story: Treatment Action Campaign**

Responding to the HIV-AIDS epidemic in 1990s South Africa, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) organised HIV+ people to gain better treatment and confront stigma. Started by anti-apartheid HIV activists, TAC grew into a dynamic social justice movement. A powerful factor was TAC's ability to attract and involve strategic allies – from international organisations such as Doctors Without Borders to local community groups, faith-based networks, labour unions, children's organisations, legal support and research institutions, and health-service associations among others.

A membership-based organisation, TAC, began with a centralised leadership structure in which key community members and allies made decisions and took action with great agility. Later, TAC developed local branches across the country, and this allowed for more direct community participation, including voting on major movement decisions and working as HIV educators and promoters with government health centres. Despite challenges, TAC affected all levels of power including government, corporations, and the invisible systems of beliefs and norms that stigmatise HIV and reinforce people's sense of powerlessness. TAC has achieved substantial impact – improving the health and dignity of people living with HIV as well as the entire health system and even levels of democratic participation. A variety of factors contributed to TAC's success, including its founders' experience both in South Africa's liberation struggle and in being HIV positive; the resultant political trust; the agility and efficient coordination with which TAC could respond to changing power dynamics; and the scope and creativity of its strategies – from those aimed at the expansion, education, and participation of its members and allies, to the combination of confrontational direct actions with more traditional advocacy and communication approaches.

## Theme 4: Who are 'We'?



Many international NGOs believe that they are fighting for our (anti-mining) agenda but without asking us what our agenda is. They take policy positions without even asking us. This can undermine our movement and put us at risk. They don't feel the attacks and repercussions like we do.

*- Activist from the Peaceful Resistance La Puya, Guatemala, during a mining blockade*

Given our vision and principles, pathways forward, theories of change, and understanding of movements and movement building, the next step is to assess who 'we' are and where we are situated in relation to the broader change ecosystem – civil society organisations, community and faith groups, social media, and other entities. We started to identify other change-makers in our 'pathways' pictures. Now, we seek to:

- Locate our activism more specifically in relation to other actors and wider movements.
- Understand better what we bring.
- Identify where we might need to stretch or contribute more to movements by building alliances, facilitating learning, organising, and more.

Successful social movements are a complex mosaic of different kinds of people, identities, and groups, both formal and informal, aligned toward the same goals. The individual parts of a movement may be very diverse and our own role may be just one part of the whole.

### ACTIVITY 7:

#### Who are 'we' and what do we bring?

Here, we take stock of who 'we' are – as individual activists and as collectives – where we are positioned in the wider ecosystem of actors, and what our contribution might be.

**Materials:** Flip chart paper, markers, dot stickers or the virtual equivalent

#### Step 1: Locating ourselves and our organisations

**Plenary:** Introduce the purpose and process.

First, invite personal reflection. Ask:

- What motivates you to be involved in efforts for social change in your context?
- What kind of social change work do you participate in individually and with what kind of group or organisation are you active? (There may be more than one.)

Together, list the kinds of groups and organisations represented in the room. Note the categories on a flip chart.

Next, ask people to identify others that are not represented here. Use the list below, and add others, to expand the range of actors that might be involved in a wider movement ecosystem.

- Movement
- Informal association
- Alliance or collaborative
- Local service NGO
- Research group
- National advocacy NGO or non-profit
- Legal or policy support group
- Campaign
- Media group
- International NGO
- Funder
- Grassroots group
- Movement support
- Other (specify)

Give each person three dot stickers and ask them to place these stickers next to the names of groups or organisations that they are most active in or connected to. Look at the results together and reflect:

- Where is our activism and change work located?
- Are there types of groups or organisations that we don't have much connection with? Why or why not?
- What, if anything, do we miss by not having those relationships in our change work?

**Small groups:** Clustered according to the categories of groups or organisations represented, discuss the questions together. Write your individual or collective responses on six different colours of sticky notes or coloured cards, two for each question:

1. When you consider your group or organisation, what individual words describe what you stand for?
2. What characteristics distinguish your group or organisation? Examples might be area of focus, staffing, membership, level of commitment to struggle, location/scope of operations (community/local, national, international), leadership and accountability structures, funding sources, etc. Name three.
3. What are the key contributions and strengths that you offer within a wider movement ecosystem, in terms of capacities, connections, reputation, or other resources? Name three.

**Plenary:** Place three flip charts on the wall, one for each of the questions. Each group presents and places their cards on the flip chart. Compare and review them. Then ask:

- What does this tell us about the diversity of groups that make up (or that contribute to) a successful social movement?
- What kinds of strengths or contributions do we bring to the wider movement ecosystem?
- What gaps are we filling, or could we fill?
- What are some of the bridges and connections we might want to strengthen to increase our capacity and build our social change infrastructure?

Draw out commonalities and differences. Ask:

- What might these imply for our contributions to movement building, individually and in the groups we belong to?
- What changes might be needed in our roles, strengths, and contributions?

## Step 2: Where are we situated in the broader movement ecosystem?

**Small groups:** To identify other actors in this ecosystem, discuss:

- Who are your allies and friends? How closely do you work with them?
- Who is in your inner circle?
- Who are the other players or communities whose work and activism are adjacent, similar, or aligned to yours?
- How do they see you?

Pick three key insights and someone to report back.

**Plenary:** Each group shares their three key insights. Point out and discuss any significant differences or disagreements. Ask:

- What new or strengthened relationships would deepen and expand your impact and community? What connections would help strengthen movement power?
- What challenges arise between NGOs and other formations such as movements? How do, or could you, deal with them? (Refer to the quotation at the start of this Theme.)
- What can your group, organisation, or movement do to be a better colleague and ally?
- How do others in the ecosystem view you? What do they say about you? What might this mean for movement building and strategy?
- What might this mean to your ability to build relations and power? What challenges do these reflections highlight for you and your organisation?
- Have you any new insights about movements, relating your own experience to our activities on visioning and pathways?



1 African American writer, educator and spoken word artist.

2 JASS Executive Director

3 Uruguayan poet, philosopher, and activist. "[In Dare to Question: A journal for uprising](#)"

4 American anthropologist, educator, museum director, and college president.

5 "[Dreams](#)". From *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, published by Alfred A. Knopf/Vintage. Copyright © 1994 by the Estate of Langston Hughes.

6 African American writer, educator, and spoken word artist.

7 "[The Pandemic as Portal](#)". *Financial Times*, April 3, 2020

8 <https://systemicalternatives.org/2014/11/25/earth-democracy-ten-principles-of-justice-sustainability-and-peace/>

9 Paraphrased from [https://www.uhn.ca/Research/Research\\_Institutes/The\\_Institute\\_for\\_Education\\_Research/Events/Documents/Care-Manifesto-Readings.pdf](https://www.uhn.ca/Research/Research_Institutes/The_Institute_for_Education_Research/Events/Documents/Care-Manifesto-Readings.pdf)

10 <https://www.themixedspace.com/7-principles-of-zapatismo-to-consider-in-community-building/>

11 <https://cjc.org.za/about>

12 US Civil rights activist. Speech in the marble steps, Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC (August 28, 1963)

13 Tanzanian feminist, diplomat, and educator.

14 "Traveler, There Is No Path". Antonio Machado, trans. Willis Barnstone from *Antonio Machado, Border of a Dream: Selected Poems*, Copper Canyon Press, 2004

15 Barndt, Deborah, *Naming the Moment: Political Analysis for Action. A Manual for Community Groups*, The Moment Project, The Centre for Social Faith and Justice, Toronto, 1991.

16 Srilatha Batliwala, "All About Movements: Why building movements creates deeper change", CREA 2020.