

# 6

# POWER AND STRATEGY





**We must dare to invent the future.**

*- Thomas Sankara,  
Burkinabe Pan African revolutionary (1949–87)*

This chapter makes the bridge from power analysis and other key processes outlined in the Guide to strategy. Strategy is a collaborative process that guides groups, organisations, and movements towards achieving systemic, structural, and material change for justice, equity, and wellbeing.

Power analysis is central to developing strategy, because it:

- Helps identify and assess who and what are at the root of systemic and structural inequities, injustices and violence we seek to address.
- Shows where and how to focus change efforts in a given context and moment while investing in the long-term power-building process.
- Locates and directs our organising and change work within the wider movement ecosystem.
- Invites us to build, mobilise, and exercise our power with others over time to make all that happen.

Strategy guides what we do (why, when, where, and with whom) but equally how we do it, so that we seed the change we want, embody our vision and values, and create an ever bigger and more inclusive 'we'.

This chapter draws on a core set of ideas and covers five themes for approaching strategy.

## **Core Ideas**

We begin by defining a set of core ideas that are used throughout the chapter. You may want to share this set of concepts and processes, relevant to all the themes in this chapter, with the people taking part in your process.

### **Theme 1: What is Strategy?**

What are the key components of a social change strategy? What needs to be in place as a foundation for creating strategy? We begin by reviewing elements that we identified in the first five chapters of this Guide. Then we approach strategy with a movement-building lens; locate our actions within the context of a broader movement ecosystem; and identify opportunities for connections, alignment, coordination, and building 'movement infrastructure' around the agenda and vision we hold.

### **Theme 2: Connecting Analysis to Strategy**

In Chapter 3: Making Sense of Power, we began to think about strategy using a power analysis. Here, we deepen that work by going back to the case study *COPINH: Guardians of the River*. We examine

more closely who and what COPINH was up against in each of the four arenas of power, explore the implications for their strategic approach to resistance and advocacy, and look at how they built their power and cohesion. COPINH's experience offers many lessons about the factors that shape strategic choices and the range of possible responses and tactics.

### **Theme 3: Context and Moment**

As we discussed in Chapter 2, the specific context and moment shape strategic choices, pathways, and risks. The issues we seek to address, and our organisational capacity, resources, and relationships are also pivotal in determining how we move and what's at stake. We discuss what factors matter, how they shape our strategies, and what strategies look like in repressive and crisis contexts.

### **Theme 4: Building and Exercising Power**

Our greatest source of strength and legitimacy is our collective capacity to mobilise and exercise our power through organising, leadership development, and alliance-building over time. Catalysing our 'connective tissue' – from small groups to networks – is an essential strategy that involves many kinds of processes, possibilities and challenges. We make a distinction between organising and mobilising power and offer tools and methodologies for building *power within, to, with and for*.

### **Theme 5: Engaging and Resisting**

Policy advocacy and lobbying are a primary focus of many civil society organisations. Yet engaging visible power may not always be effective in a given context or moment, and requires complementary tactics if it is to be effective. We offer tools and examples for deciding whether and where to engage in policy spaces, and when acts of resistance or creating autonomous spaces may be required – whether on their own, or as part of 'inside-outside' strategies.

## Core Ideas

### Strategies for movement building

Any strategy includes short- and medium-term processes and actions in pursuit of long-term goals. A movement-building strategy specifies how organising, leadership-development, alliances and joint action build capacity and community over time to advance the values and vision that center justice and belonging. In a context of constant flux, think of strategy as the compass that orients decision-making and informs short-, medium-, and long-term actions and processes.



To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality."

- bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, 2014

Movement strategy depends upon five components:

1. Creating a shared guiding **vision of change**;
2. Understanding **context, moment and power**;
3. Articulating a **bold ambition and agenda**;
4. Forging a sense of **common ground, community, and belonging**; and
5. Building and leveraging leadership and organising **capacity, clout, resources, and alliances**.

### A movement ecosystem

Depending on the moment and context, different forms of engagement make sense. At times, strategies to reform visible power and formal structures (policy, laws, budgets, elections, etc.) may be key, at other times they are either too risky or not likely to produce the change we want. Some movements will focus on other ways to contest power – resisting and exposing powerful interests, re-imagining and reclaiming alternative ways of living, creating sovereign and autonomous spaces, or blocking or shutting down oppressive systems. For any of these approaches to deliver social and political change, narrative strategies are vital to legitimise agendas and broaden popular support and momentum.

All of these strategies can co-exist in a movement ecosystem. They can be complementary or merely parallel. Intentional alignment and complementarity are powerful. Ask yourselves:

- Where does your organisation sit within a larger movement ecosystem of organisations and individual change-makers and activists?
- What do you and your organisation bring to this ecosystem?
- With whom might you find common purpose or align?
- How can you harness collective efforts for greater impact?



## Essential movement strategies

***Organise and educate:*** Organising is about bringing people's concerns, dreams and indignation together into a collective organised force for change. Deep dialogue and collective learning (for example through Feminist Popular Education) mixed with new types of knowledge are central to building individual and collective leadership and common agendas. Organising and educating help establish trust and cohesion across differences to create an energising bond and a liberatory force. Organising builds the essential base and constituencies to drive and embody change over time.

***Reform and engage:*** These strategies aim to change specific laws and policies and their enforcement in order to stop harms, address structural discrimination, redirect resources, and better serve all people, the planet, and our future. We campaign and engage in elections to promote leaders who are more representative and accountable. We go to court to block or address harm. We lobby and advocate to pressure decisionmakers on the specifics of policy and implementation. We may seek to change rules and practices within religious, educational institutions, civil society organisations, and corporations – not only governments.

***Network and connect:*** Building a bigger 'we' – to leverage greater power – involves working with people and different kinds of organisations, some of whom may not agree with us on everything. Alliances demand trust building because of inevitable conflict over power,



resources, visibility, representation, and values. Beyond our own groups, we can advance our agendas by building tactical alliances with key experts, researchers, and officials inside the structures of power.

***Resist and expose:*** We can rally constituencies, allies and supporters by working with social media activists, journalists, and researchers, and through mobilisations to confront and expose injustice, corruption, and abuse of power. Challenging the legitimacy of the system – through civil disobedience, non-compliance, rejection of existing decision-making processes, and use of autonomous spaces or boycotts – are other ways to resist. Direct action such as protests, blockades, marches, boycotts and non-participation build public pressure, create opportunities for people to act on frustrations, and amplify our messages and demands.

***Create and claim:*** Other strategies disengage with the state and visible power, and instead establish autonomous and sovereign spaces, such as cooperatives, commons, or self-defined or ancestral forms of community governance. Such independent initiatives enable communities to define and protect ways of life and economies that are aligned with their beliefs and values. Using media and messaging, they can share their example to inspire others and to shape narratives and public discussion about broader possibilities for change.

***Narrate and communicate:*** We need to expose and challenge the dominant narratives that generate fear and polarise and dehumanise groups, and create our own narratives to offer alternative explanations and worldviews that centre life, care, dignity, and reciprocity. Communicating our narratives digitally – as well as via traditional media, popular culture, and face-to-face through dialogue and popular education – serves to connect a larger ‘we’. Symbolic and cultural change strategies can be demonstrated through art, songs, humour, theatre, poetry, and dance to build strength and convey alternatives.

***Reimagine:*** Central to all these processes is the inspiring reimagined future that we seek. Individual and collective practices of radical imagination draw on our wisdom and values and beliefs to build a sense of purpose and power for social transformation.

No single organisation can do everything that is needed to transform power. In the constellation of actors, it is key to have organisers and it helps to have specialised capacities in support of frontline communities including legal and research aid, security, and media. The idea of the movement ecosystem situates our efforts in a larger agenda.



**Movements are born of critical connections rather than critical mass.”**

*- Grace Lee Boggs, American activist*

The collaborative process of strategy development is an opportunity to deepen shared analysis and to build collective consciousness, political trust, and a sense of ownership.

### **Movement infrastructure**

“Social movement infrastructure can be physical – the meeting spaces where people come together or the megaphones and equipment people use in the streets; movement infrastructure can be organisational – regular coordination spaces to engage in consultation and move work forward; and movement infrastructure can be intellectual – power mapping, databases, and contact lists... [it] can be relationships and networks – building alliances, facilitating conversations, aligning around collective demands.... (and) training new organisers. And more often than not, the strength of the movement infrastructure that is in place just before ... trigger events take place can play an incredibly influential role in how high movements can ride waves of action and how far those waves can carry movements.” *Movement Catalyst*<sup>1</sup>

### **Emergent strategy**

Activists and scholars are generating fresh thinking about strategy that is better suited to our turbulent times than the results-specific strategic planning theories of an earlier era. These ideas consider the relational, contentious, zigzag nature of social change and power. For example, the activist and writer adrienne maree brown draws on patterns of nature and ecological systems to conceptualise “[emergent strategy](#)”.



**Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for. ... Everything is about relationships, critical connections; chaos is an essential process that we need to engage; the sharing of information is fundamental for organisational success; and vision is an invisible field that binds us together, emerging from relationships and chaos and information.”**

*- Adrienne Maree Brown<sup>2</sup>*

Good strategy is about holding the realities of the present while imagining the future and weaving a bigger ‘we’ that can enable us to navigate the unexpected. Effective social change work demands agility – to be able to step into unexpected moments and opportunities to block or speak out against injustice or move a justice agenda forward. Our actions are never exactly as we plan – adjustments, learning and the unexpected shape fresh directions and offer new insights. Praxis – the habit of action–reflection–action – remains a crucial process.

# Theme 1:

## What is Strategy?

We use the word ‘strategy’ to mean the longer-term framework that guides a change effort, but it can also describe the specific actions, tactics, and processes used in the shorter term. This may be a bit confusing. Find the words that make sense to you in your language and political culture to distinguish a big picture strategy from a more immediate or focused one.

Activists and organisations facing huge external pressures tend to focus on immediate, short-term priorities and routine approaches to planning. They don’t always stop to critically reflect on the context, the histories they build upon, their assumptions about how change happens, and what they can do to achieve it over the long-term.

Everything in this Guide so far has prepared us to construct strategies that navigate, build, and transform power for social justice. Strategy comes together by connecting all the strands of analysis, visioning, and prioritising.

Not everyone using this Guide will work in a direct movement-building role, but we can all locate our actions within the broader movement ecosystem in which our organisations, strategies and agendas sit, and identify ways to connect, align, coordinate, and build movement power, connections, and infrastructure.

### ACTIVITY 1:

## Components of a movement strategy

**Materials:** flipchart paper, sticky notes, pens, handout: *Strategy components*

**Plenary:** Introduce the activity. Share the handout: Strategy Components. Introduce each component and ask people to recall key insights and ‘aha’ moments from earlier sessions. Prompt with examples from the analysis and insights they have generated so far, or invite them to reflect on these questions now.

**Individually:** Invite people to look at the questions on the handout and jot down any key insights. Ask them to choose three key insights and write them on sticky notes.

**Plenary:** For each component, people take turns to post their sticky notes on the flipcharts or slides, reading out and explaining each one. When one component is done, review the notes and ask:

- Is anything missing here?
- Does anything stand out?
- How does this component contribute to shaping strategy?



## Strategy components

Movement strategy depends upon organising and groundwork around the five key components in the table below.

### Components of a movement-building strategy

Components	Questions for reflection	Key insights
<b>Our guiding vision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What future have we reimagined – what will be different in the world in this future? What problems will be solved? (<i>see Chapter 1: Getting Started, Activities 3 and 4</i>)</li> <li>What are our core beliefs, ethics and ways of working related to our vision? How can we live into our values and principles? (<i>see Chapter 1: Getting Started, Activity 5</i>)</li> <li>What are our assumptions about how change happens? What do we assume about how to build and change power? (<i>see Chapter 2: Getting Started, Activity 6 and Chapter 3: Making Sense of Power, Activity 10</i>)</li> </ul>	
<b>Context, moment and power analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What's happening in the moment in our context? What are the implications for our vision and agenda?</li> <li>What can we learn from previous history and those who came before us in this work?</li> <li>Who are the key actors and interests currently contesting for power and what are the beliefs and narratives they are mobilising to advance their interests?</li> <li>Who is pushing back?</li> <li>What are the contradictions and where do you see opportunities or openings? (<i>see Chapter 3: Making Sense of Power</i>)</li> </ul>	
<b>Bold ambition and agenda</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the solution or agenda we're advancing? What is the deeper structural, social and material change we're seeking? (<i>see Chapter 1: Getting Started</i>)</li> <li>What are our immediate demands and proposals? How are we communicating key narratives to build and activate support? (<i>see case studies and Chapter 5: Narratives and Power</i>)</li> </ul>	
<b>Common ground, community and belonging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is the "we" in this effort? How are we connecting and engaging a broad "we?"</li> <li>What stories and experiences do we have in common? How are we nourishing a sense of community, culture and belonging to inspire and fuel our work for change? How do the futures we imagine and dream of speak to us collectively? (<i>see Chapter 2: Getting Started, Activities 1, 2 and 3</i>)</li> <li>How do we affirm and connect across our diverse identities, as a source of collective power and liberation? (<i>See Chapter 4: Intersectionality, Identities and Power</i>)</li> </ul>	
<b>Organised capacity, resources and allies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do we bring to the work – knowledge, resources, relationships, organisation and capacities? Who do we rely on for other contributions to the work? Where are we situated within the wider movement ecosystem? What relationships matter most? Which need building? Who are our key allies? (<i>See Chapter 2: Getting Started, Activities 7 and 8</i>)</li> </ul>	



Movements matter because the people most affected by injustice join hands, organise themselves, and act together for the change they seek – and through their collective power and passionate vision of a better world, they create deep and sustainable change.... Feminist movement building is based on a deeper understanding of how power structures operate, especially patriarchal power”.

- Srilatha Batliwala, *All About Movements*, CREA

## ACTIVITY 2:

### Strategy for movement-building

**Materials:** Virtual equivalents; notes or outputs from Chapter 1: Getting Started, Activity 5: Living into our visions and values, and Activity 7: Movements and Movement-Building, including copies of the Handout: *Movements and movement-building*.

Make, print, or share a large copy of the graphic *Components of a movement-building strategy*

**Plenary:** Display the resources and outputs from Chapter 1: Getting Started (if you worked on this). Introduce the activity with the ideas that open this chapter and section, adapting them to people's specific context and issues.

**Individually:** Invite people to reflect on their personal experiences of strategy and movement-building – whether through direct involvement or observation of a movement and strategies they are familiar with. Then jot down brief answers:

- What in your experience is 'strategy'?
- What kinds of strategies have you been part of, or what strategies have you seen other social change efforts use? What do you feel worked well and not so well?
- What do you see as five key components needed to create an effective strategy, one that contributes to movement building?

Write your five key points on sticky notes. Focus on key components, rather than the strategies themselves.

**Plenary:** Display a large version of the graphic *Components of a movement strategy*. Invite each person to place their sticky notes one by one on the graphic, on or near the most relevant component. When everyone has shared, open a discussion.

- What has this group identified as the most important components?
- What are other key elements for developing a movement strategy in your view?
- What do these different strategies contribute to making change and how can they be complementary?

### Movement ecosystem

A movement-building strategy inevitably combines different tactics, processes, and actions carried out by different organisations and entities, rather than a singular plan from a single group. These organisations play different roles and make distinct strategic contributions in the broader movement ecosystem, particularly if they are more or less aligned and connected. No single organisation pursues all of the strategies necessary, but together, with intention, they can become a powerful force for change. Different actors play diverse but ideally complementary roles so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. We need to locate our organisational and individual positioning and contributions in the broader ecosystem and identify potential alliances and alignment with others pursuing complementary strategies



### ACTIVITY 3:

## Movement ecosystem: sample responses for 'organise and educate'

**Materials:** Display a large copy of A movement ecosystem, and provide copies as a handout; flipchart paper, six large strategy cards for each work table. Plus, for Step 2, dot stickers of different colours

**Plenary:** Refer to the definition of strategy:

- Strategy is a collaborative process that guides people, organisations and movements towards achieving systemic, structural, and material change for justice and belonging.
- Any strategy includes short- and medium-term actions in pursuit of long-term goals. A movement-building strategy specifies how organising, leadership-development, alliances and joint action build capacity over time to advance the values and vision. In a context of constant flux, think of strategy as the compass that orients decision-making and informs short-, medium-, and long-term actions and processes.



### Step 1: World café

**Plenary:** Place one of the six strategy cards on each of six work tables. Invite people to group themselves by strategy, ensuring equal numbers per table.

**Small groups:** Each group appoints a note-taker who stays at the same table. The rest of the group moves from one table to another for three rounds of 10 to 15 minutes per round. At each table, the group discusses:

- WHAT does this strategy accomplish in relation to building and changing power?
- WHY is this strategy critical in relation to the others and for achieving change?
- HOW is this strategy carried out? What does it look like in practice?
- WHEN is this strategy most useful?
- WHO should be involved and how?
- WHERE is this strategy used?

The note-taker summarises the first round and adds new points from subsequent rounds.

**Plenary:** The whole group moves together from one table to the next. Each note-taker summarises the key points from that table.

## Movement ecosystem: sample responses for 'organise and educate'

<b>WHAT?</b>	Shared understanding and analysis of the issues, a space for re-imagining the future, and a collective vision of change
<b>WHY?</b>	<i>Power within, to, with and for</i> ; a base of activist leaders and a broader interconnected 'meshwork' of organisations in alignment to expand reach and navigate risk and opportunity; validate and celebrate values, vision, agendas, joy, and critical connections
<b>HOW?</b>	Popular education, community organising, storytelling, joint analysis, dialogue and collective planning; mutual learning around lived experience, identifying common problems; building collective and individual leadership, agendas and coordination; care and healing; dancing, creativity and joy
<b>WHEN?</b>	Ongoing; to build trust, coordinate capacity at all levels
<b>WHO?</b>	Centring those most affected; ensuring they are at the heart and in the forefront of organising, leadership, and representation
<b>WHERE?</b>	Local and national levels, with cross-border connections and networks

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

The Movement Ecosystem helps us to situate our organisations and our change strategies in a given context and moment in time, and in relation to the many other different actors, groups, and forms of activism and influence that contribute to the change we are seeking. No single organisation or activist can do every strategy, so the ecosystem guides us to think about our identity, niche, and strengths along with the possible gaps in our strategy and alignment, and to consider where we can build alliances and coordinate better.

**Plenary:** Hand out three different colours of dot stickers to each person (or use three colours of markers to draw dots). Thinking about the identified strategies, and allowing for overlap:

- Place a dot of one colour on the strategies you are most engaged with (use more than one dot if you work in more than one area).
- Place a dot of the second colour on areas where allies or others you know are engaged.
- Place a dot of the third colour areas where there seem to be gaps, or where you may need to stretch or adopt strategies.

Review the results and ask:

- What are your main assets, resources and areas of strategic focus?
- In what areas are others working? Who are they and what are they doing?
- With whom are you in relationship or alliance? With whom are you not connected?
- Where are the gaps or areas you (or others) may need to stretch into?
- Where do you need to build capacities, relationships, and alliances to move your agenda forward?



Use lines to connect the groups and efforts where relationships and alignment can be strengthened or developed; a dotted line for areas of coordination and a solid line to show formal alliances or collaboration to develop.



### **Alignment and infrastructure**

Alliances vs alignment: It is not always necessary or possible to build relationships or alliances with all actors across a movement ecosystem but it can be beneficial to have a greater awareness about who is doing what and how best to coordinate, even without direct collaboration.

Lack of alignment is a major weakness among NGOs and across movements. The movement ecosystem tool and process invite orientation and alignment across different strategies in a way that potentially strengthens connection and movement infrastructure.

Timing shapes the opportunities for strengthening infrastructure across the ecosystem. In crises and when injustices and repression are extreme, often the energy to connect, unify, and build power is greater. These are important moments to invest in organising.



**One way of organizing across diversity and in complexity is to see it in terms of alignment around key challenges, rather than one-size solutions that focus on getting everyone to do the same thing. We align both to interrupt the advance of authoritarianism and destruction, and to build something new – the notion of block, build, transform – and making sure that we are dedicating our human capacity towards all of those kinds of activities”**

*- Tarso Ramos<sup>3</sup>*

## Theme 2: Connecting Analysis to Strategy

Strategy development requires layers of power analysis and information-gathering. In order to make strategic choices for both long-term power-building and short-term tactics we must identify:

- The overall dynamics and actors shaping the situation we want to change.
- More specifics about who (the players and decisionmakers and their relationships) and what (for example, norms, beliefs, and narratives) we're up against and what their agendas and interests are.
- Where the opportunities, contradictions, unexpected allies, and levers of change may be, outside or inside the structures we seek to change.
- Potential risks and precise conflicts, and how to mitigate and prepare for them.
- How and with whom we can build and leverage power.
- What we are demanding, exposing, and blocking, and what are we working to change and create.
- What story and narrative support the change we seek.

In developing strategy, details matter. This section therefore draws on the Guardians of the River case study, which offers specific lessons about the factors shaping strategic choices, as well as a range of possible strategies and tactics. It is illustrative of the possibilities of connection with the broader movement ecosystem and about the specifics of context, issues, and actors.



*COPINH: Communities defend territory and bodies in Honduras*

## Example of Power and Strategy Matrix<sup>4</sup>

Contested arenas of power	POWER OVER Power to control, exclude, privilege some groups and interests over others, coerce, divide, silence	CHANGE STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	
		Engage, challenge, expose, and resist dominant power	Build, create, and mobilise transformative power
<b>Visible power – making and enforcing the rules</b>  Presidents, legislatures, courts, ministries, police, military, United Nations, World Bank, chambers of commerce.  Instruments: Policies, laws, constitutions, budgets, regulations, conventions, agreements, and enforcing mechanisms, etc.	Biased laws/policies  Decision-making structures that favour the elite and powerful and exclude or target (through biased enforcement) others based on gender, race, class, location.  Unrepresentative governance bodies Lack of transparency and accountability Laws not upheld/ gap between law and practice  Policy + budgets written by corporate or other (hidden power) interests	Demand accountability to existing laws and agreements or challenge discrimination (in the law or in enforcement) using advocacy, lawsuits  Expose corruption, ties to hidden power or injustice with direct action, petitions, strikes, vigils, social media, etc.  Align advocacy “inside” visible power with “outside” pressure strategies	<b>Impact Decisions and Governance: Laws, Policy, Judicial, and Spending</b>  Mobilise community power for accountability  Leverage relationships with allies in key positions  Engage in legal, political, and judicial advocacy  Reform institutions  Shape policies and practices  Garner mainstream media coverage  Influence political party agendas, support candidates that represent our interests, get involved in education and mobilisation around elections; provide protection against electoral violence
<b>Hidden power – setting the agenda</b>  Political control over what and who is part of decision making  Exclusion & delegitimization of others through “unwritten rules”, intimidation, misinformation, and co-optation  Examples: industry suppression of climate science	Activist leaders are discredited as troublemakers or outsiders and their issues as elitist, impractical, anti-tradition, etc. (e.g. LGBTQI+ rights / labour rights are ‘special’ interests)  Collusion where the state protects private actors (corporations, financiers, oligarchs, etc.) by detaining activists and using lawsuits and libel cases to silence organisations who expose corruption.  Media does not consider these groups’ issues newsworthy  Corporations and political leaders prevent information from going public	Research and expose hidden power actors and their influence and interests  Expose and discredit shadow actors  Develop strategies to protect ourselves from detention, threats, and backlash  Amplify power of grassroots and women leaders  Connect local to national to global organising efforts to align pressure on powerful	<b>Build our own movement infrastructure, visions, agendas, and narratives</b>  Build collective power of communities  Strengthen movement leadership and organisation  Build strategic alliances across borders and sectors  Participatory research to legitimise our issues  Mobilise popular narratives and cultural strategies to reach out and build a larger “we”
<b>Invisible power – shaping norms and beliefs</b>  Socialisation: Cultural norms, values, practices, and customs shape people’s understanding of their needs, rights, roles, and normalise inequities and the status quo  Control of information and political narrative to “manufacture consent” and silence dissent  Dominant ideologies validate social realities	Socialization/oppression Belief systems (e.g. patriarchy) cause internalisation of inferiority, powerlessness, shame, anger, resignation, etc.  Dominant ideologies and narratives in popular culture, education, and media reinforce bias and inequality and stifle other ways of thinking (e.g. women blame themselves for abuse)  Crucial information is misrepresented or withheld  Misinformation and disinformation that can polarise and create conflict among us or doubt in solutions	Challenge and disrupt repressive social norms and traditions  Question taboos and use of shame/guilt to control  Name and expose underlying interests and values driving political narratives  Draw attention to contradictions and impacts of invisible power  Understand fear as a tool of control and its impact on our bodies  Engage in careful media analysis to sort out reality from misinformation	<b>Create shared awareness through analysing context, power through lived experience</b>  Develop new agendas and our own narratives  Foster critical consciousness, self-esteem, and solidarity  Amplify non-dominant voices, ideas, views, and beliefs  Influence and inform public discourse, attitudes, and behaviour  Creatively produce media and cultural, artistic practices. Use music, songs, and popular culture  Cultivate alternative ideas and models for economic, social, and ecological well-being
<b>Systemic power – defining the logic of all power relationships</b>  Setting the codes of inequality, individualism, competition, exploitation – of people and nature; the use of violence for control based on capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy-racism, colonialism, imperialism	Preventing ‘real’ solutions, e.g. ending fossil fuel dependency  Naturalising the way things are (e.g. trans is “abnormal”) and patriarchy “protects women and children better”  Preventing and demonising significant alternative economic approaches	Expose how the dominant logics are at work in policies, institutions, etc. and the effect they have  Activate collective imagination and desire for futures that embody liberation, collective benefit, and planetary survival  Lift up different ideological, political, cultural, and economic ideas and ways of living in order to break the hold of current systemic logics (e.g. Indigenous cosmovision, care economies, feminist just transition, solidarity economy, etc.)	<b>Reimagine the future, our path to liberation, and how we can live in balance with nature</b>  Support social practices and rituals that preserve or recover ancestral knowledge and ways of thinking  Create cooperatives, collectives, mutual aid, and other interdependent, alternative ways of living that address needs, care, and practise inclusive democracy. Autonomous - liberated zones or small alternative structures  Eg. Ubuntu, Pekka Savings Cooperatives, Cooperation Jackson MS[2], Zapatistas[3], Rojava[4] Kurdish Forces, many indigenous communities

## COPINH's strategy

**Materials:** Case study: *Guardians of the River*; large copy of the handout: *Movement ecosystem* graphic on the wall; copies of handout: Power and Strategy worksheet; sticky notes or cards in four different colours.

### Step 1: Connecting COPINH's power analysis and strategic choices

**Plenary:** Place a large Movement Ecosystem on the wall with space to add stickies around each strategy. Download, share, or refer to the example of a power and strategy matrix.

Use the *Power and Strategy worksheet* to take a more nuanced look at how different arenas of power require different strategies for resisting and building power. The two right hand columns invite different kinds of observations about strategy. In the column labelled "Engage, challenge, expose, and resist dominant power", note actions COPINH took to confront and shift the power dynamics and actors in the context. In the column "Build, create, and mobilise transformative power", note the ways in which COPINH built their transformative power, including the more internally focused activities that strengthened their cohesion.

Introduce the small group activity and form four small groups. Assign one colour of sticky note for each arena of power.

**Small groups:** Use the *Power and Strategy worksheet* to analyse the struggle of COPINH (and the wider movement) against the Agua Zarca Dam. For each arena of power, note specific examples of power over in the first column:

- Who and what are the actors, structures, and forces that contribute to the problems that COPINH is confronting?
- In the case of specific actors, what are their interests? Remember that strategies and power dynamics operate at local, national, regional, and international levels.

Note answers in any or all of the three columns:

- How does identity – particularly gender, ethnicity, class, and location – play out in each arena of power, both in terms of discrimination and violence, and in relation to strategy, as a potential source of community and narrative-cultural strategies?

In the second two columns, identify the strategies used by COPINH and their allies to challenge and build power in each arena – both to oppose the dam and to build and exercise their own power:

- What were the different entry points, angles and possibilities for challenging the construction of the dam and the political repression accompanying it?
- At the global level, how did the US Congress figure in COPINH's power analysis and strategies? What was the role of the legal system?
- What about other global, regional, and international institutions?
- How did COPINH and their allies build, mobilise, and exercise their power?
- How did COPINH engage, challenge and contest ideas, beliefs and narratives? How did they activate different belief systems and views of the world?

As a final step, pick key strategies (maximum three) used by COPINH or their allies, and write these on the sticky notes, using the colours assigned for each arena of power.

**Plenary:** Groups take turns to share highlights from the *power over* column, building on each other's contributions rather than repeating. Focus on how the different arenas of power intersect and involve converging structures, actors, and dynamics. Invite each group in turn to share the COPINH strategies they identified, starting with those for contesting visible power, then moving to hidden, invisible, and systemic.

## Step 2: COPINH's Strategies in the movement ecosystem

**Plenary:** Examine the range of COPINH strategies in light of the broader movement ecosystem. Invite small groups to place their sticky notes on the Movement Ecosystem, near the relevant area of strategy.

Notice any patterns, such as colours of sticky notes clustered around certain kinds of strategies, or gaps where there are fewer strategies.

- How did COPINH build and mobilise their power to resist or block the building of the dam?
- What organised capacity was COPINH able to activate in their resistance – members, allies, etc?
- How did they use and influence legal mechanisms and policy spaces to advance and draw attention to their agenda and defend their rights?
- What resources, capacities and alliances did they require?
- How did they turn up the heat on decision makers and expose corrupt abuses of power through direct action?
- How did they continue to build and mobilise relationships with allies both inside and outside structures of power, within movements and across borders?
- How did their vision and values shape their strategy and their narrative, and serve as the foundation of their power?

Share and discuss the handout: [Lessons from COPINH](#).

## Step 3: Vision and values

"In our worldview, we are beings who come from the earth, the water and the corn. The Lenca people are ancestral guardians of the rivers... [taught] that giving our lives in various ways to protect the rivers is to give our lives for the well-being of humanity and of this planet." Berta Caceres, Goldman Prize acceptance speech

**Plenary:** An effective long-term strategy is always anchored in a clear vision, explicit values, and a bold ambition or intention. COPINH's vision and values provided a continuous touchpoint for the political culture it seeks to create, and its community-building, demands, and narratives.

**Buzz groups:** Use stickies and a brainstorming process to generate words and phrases that capture COPINH's vision, values, and bold ambition.

**Plenary:** Read aloud the quote from Berta Cáceres' speech when she won the Goldman Environmental Prize (duplicated above). Discuss:

- How do you think COPINH's vision and values shaped their strategy and strengthened their base of community members and allies?
- How did COPINH's years of community building and other groundwork strengthen their power and fortify their resistance?
- From your own experience or study, how do vision and values shape and strengthen the strategies, agendas, and ways of working of organisations and movements?



## Lessons in movement strategy from COPINH

Strategy development relies on many layers of analysis and information gathering about power, which can be an important organising and leadership-building process in itself.

Deep, continuous community building and involvement is vital for unity and united action. Forging local alliances, and ties with friends and allies around the world – inside formal structures of power, the media and in movements – are vital to the ability to mobilise support, build clout and have influence.

### Power and Strategy worksheet

Contested arenas of power	POWER OVER Power to control, exclude, privilege some groups and interests over others, coerce, divide, silence	CHANGE STRATEGIES and ACTIONS	
		Engage, challenge, expose, and resist dominant power	Build, create, and mobilise transformative power
<b>Visible power</b> – making and enforcing the rules			
<b>Hidden power</b> – setting the agenda			
<b>Invisible power</b> – shaping norms and beliefs			
<b>Systemic power</b> – defining the logic of all power relationships			

Cultural strategies – in COPINH’s case, rooted in indigenous identity, practices, and cosmovision – feed and sustain a sense of community, shared commitment and unity.

When analysing power, it is not enough to name a ministry or ‘the army’ in general. Rather, identify specific decision-makers and structures. As you further refine the targets of tactics and influence, explore where you might find allies and whether there are conflicts, contradictions, and opportunities among actors, particularly at regional or global level. These can provide strategic opportunities.

Multi-pronged strategies offer more points of leverage and more pathways to challenge, resist and create change.

Some actors and forces are hard to identify with a specific arena of power or may come up in more than one arena. Examples:

- Corporate or privately-owned media companies are clustered as hidden power because they operate outside the formal arena of power to influence public discourse and perceptions. They may play both negative and positive roles and are essential to consider in strategies.
- Police, military and public and private security forces may play both negative and positive roles in relation to upholding or challenging the status quo. While their actions tend to be in the visible power arena, they sometimes work in alignment with hidden, invisible and systemic power.
- Digital media can play positive or negative roles. Many use social media for activism and as a source of information, organising, and connection, despite knowing that these tools are controlled by private, loosely regulated corporations that enable surveillance, polarisation, and misinformation.
- Political parties can be difficult to categorise, but because they contest for formal power, they fit in visible power for analytical purposes.
- The UN, World Bank, the IMF, and related trade mechanisms fit in visible power because they are part of the formal, public-funded governmental institutions that define rights and the ‘rules of the game’ and, sometimes, offer mechanisms for redress.

### **Aligning power analysis with possible strategies**

These are some of the ways that analysis and strategy connect:

**Visible power:** Identify a specific decisionmaker plus the legal tools and opportunities to influence or target them; technical support in the form of policy and legal knowledge and research; allies inside; clear specific demands and talking points.

**Hidden power:** Conduct quality research to expose ‘hidden’ actors, their interests and relationships to formal power. Establish broad alliances and media connections. Develop organisational capacity to mobilise virtual and in-person action. Create compelling messages, demands, and safety protocols.

**Invisible power:** Design processes for organising and developing leadership that build trust, solidarity, coordination and celebrate who we are. De-normalise and develop a critical analysis of harmful and oppressive norms and beliefs. Co-create and share narratives and messaging that communicate a different explanation of what needs to be change and a new vision of who you are and what you want.

**Systemic power:** Analyse how systemic power shapes the context and issues you are facing. Develop narratives to expose systemic problems and validate alternative ways of thinking and approaches. Create and claim autonomous spaces.

### **Being the change we seek**

Tarso Ramos says that in order to seed the change we seek, strategies must:

*Dismantle misogyny and patriarchy* (which are the building blocks of authoritarianism) and centralise both the personal and political, along with body autonomy.

*Build the practice of sharing power across difference* (racial/ethnic, religious, gendered, class, ideological); create new social and political relationships that accelerate these connections vs those that are divisive.

*Expose authoritarian power*, including in spheres of: military or police, paramilitaries, judiciary, parties and legislatures, media, narrative, ruling and business classes.

*Provide for movement and community defence.*

*Contest oppressive and exclusionary definitions of the collective* (community, nation, 'the people') with compelling alternative assertions of the 'we'.

## Theme 3:

### Context and Moment

The choice and mix of strategies are shaped by many factors unique to every place, people, moment, set of issues and organisations. Careful (power) analysis of all of these determines the pathways for contesting and changing power.

For example, COPINH's strategic choices were shaped by specific contextual realities unique to Honduras and regional institutions unique to the Americas. Their organising led to a blockade of dam equipment in one moment, and a hearing at the Inter-American Human Rights Commission in another. Similarly, the decision to build their centre, Utopia, as a space for rituals and political education was driven by a sense that the recovery of Lenca identity and worldview would be central to a shared vision of the future to guide them, and to building the power needed to confront a formidable situation.

#### ACTIVITY 5:

#### What shapes strategic choices?

This process builds on Activity 3: Mapping the movement ecosystem and Activity 4: COPINH's strategies. The aim of this next activity is to identify and explore factors to consider – particularly trends and forces in a given context – in developing strategy and choosing tactics that build organisational power as well as advancing an agenda. You will draw on what was learned from the COPINH case study to analyse your own experiences and the constraints and possibilities in your context which inform your justice work.

**Materials:** Case study COPINH: *Guardians of the River in Honduras*; handout *Factors shaping strategic choices*; flipcharts, sticky notes

Make a large copy on a flipchart of the graphic [Components of a movement-building strategy](#).

**Individually:** Reflecting on the key factors that shaped COPINH's strategies and choices, ask:

- What do you see as the most important factors about the context and moment that your own organisation must consider in making strategic choices?

Write two or three-word answers, each answer on a separate sticky note. Post your sticky notes on the flipchart, clustering them with other, similar ones.

Plenary: View the stickies together and discuss themes briefly.

**Small groups:** Discuss:

- What opportunities and enabling factors most influence your strategic choices and actions?
- What key limitations, constraints and risk factors shape your strategic choices?

Record your thoughts, one or two words each on sticky notes.

**Plenary:** Groups report and build on each other's input. They place each sticky near the most suitable of the Components of a movement-building strategy. Ask:

- How do these factors influence the choice of strategy?
- How do these factors shape the way your organisation builds and leverages its own sources of power?
- What do these factors mean for risk and safety?

Use the handout Factors shaping strategic choices to build on the discussion and the list you have generated.



### Factors shaping strategic choices

<b>Factors</b> Trends, forces, and questions to consider in making strategic choices	<b>Considerations</b> Openings and opportunities Challenges and risks
<b>Context and history</b> What are the most important aspects of your analysis of power dynamics in the context? How does history shape this context in ways that you need to be aware of?	
<b>Civic space</b> What degree of civic space exists? What openings exist that you can take advantage of? Are there any spaces you can claim even if not intended for your use? What are the risks?	
<b>Moment</b> What political/ economic/ social dynamics exist that could create opportunities to mobilise and exercise power? What are the constraints and risks in the current moment?	
<b>Entry points</b> What issues and entry points might be most effective? What openings and opportunities exist to mobilise around your agendas? What risks or obstacles?	
<b>Narratives and norms</b> What are the narratives that dominate public debate? What beliefs and norms (forms of invisible and systemic power) do they reinforce and legitimise? What is the impact? What narratives, ideas and other cultural interventions are your organization or other social movement groups invoking, creating and promoting?	
<b>Media and freedom of expression</b> What is the degree of freedom of expression and media? What level of capacity do you have to strategically use the media - mainstream, progressive platforms, social media, etc? What opportunities and risks exist in relation to media access and coverage? What kinds of surveillance and censorship is present in our context?	
<b>Capacity, resources, and reach</b> What organisational capacities, resources, and relationships (e.g. members, allies) can you mobilise? How much alignment and commitment can you count on from your allies and members? What are the risks and challenges in this area?	



## **Making strategic choices**

### ***Context and history***

The politics, history, culture, and society of any given place are critical, as they determine how the government functions and who it serves, who has economic power and who is most affected by inequalities. The social fabric – cohesiveness and community connections – also shape choices about organising and social conflict. Given a history of colonialism, imperialism and globalisation, many decisions inside a country may be controlled by outside governments, banks, and corporations – and this creates both challenges and opportunities. .

### ***Civic space***

What is the degree of political openness and basic freedoms and rights? Where are state repression and social violence happening, and misogyny tolerated and promoted? How do censorship and surveillance affect public discourse, expression, and activism and who do they affect?

### ***Entry points***

Some issues are more controversial than others. Those that generate the most conflict are often perceived as cultural – centring racism, religions, sexuality and gender – as well as economic access and the demands of the working class, poor, and marginalised. In an era of extremist and authoritarian politics, the state itself is highly contentious. In the PEKKA case study, Marginalised women organise in Indonesia, basic needs provided a less directly conflictual entry point for a strategy that eventually challenged patriarchy and capitalism and the cultural beliefs that sustain them.

### ***The moment***

Crises, scandals, natural disasters, and pivotal events (such as a pandemic or military coup) change the terrain. They may create even bigger possibilities to shape what's on the agenda and challenge dominant power or they may shut down or refocus other strategic possibilities. In the short term, major events like the sports events, concerts, a visiting dignitary, or a national holiday can create opportunities for visibility and attention.

### ***Narratives, media, and freedom of expression***

Popular culture shapes politics and beliefs and is central to messaging, narratives and outreach strategies. However, the degree of access and surveillance determines how useful social media and digital platforms will be for connecting, educating, and mobilising. Since sports, music, and popular shows shape perceptions and public discourse, they offer possibilities for change strategies.

### ***Capacity, resources, clout, and reach***

The size, scope, reputation, relationships, and reach of an organisation or network obviously determine many strategic choices. These determine how much clout an organisation can leverage to draw attention and open doors. 'Resources' refers to both funding and people – although more funding and more people do not automatically translate to greater capacity. A movement that relies on vast active constituencies though sparse funding may have far more reach than a large well-funded institution.

### **Crisis is the new normal**

This is a time of poly-crisis. Climate and ecological crises. A democracy crisis. A crisis of inequality. To build and transform power amid these and many other, simultaneous crises, movements can keep six priorities in mind.<sup>9</sup>

**Be nimble:** Crises open windows for change, but those windows don't stay open forever. Prepare organisations to be nimble so they are ready to adapt as a crisis unfolds.

**Go bold:** In moments of crisis, it is more possible to advance bold demands for structural reform than it is in normal times. Millions of people go through intense struggles in moments of crisis, and their immediate needs mandate solutions that go beyond what established mechanisms can address. As a result, bold demands often make more sense than incremental reforms in moments of crisis.

**Make meaning:** In moments of crisis, people need to be able to make meaning out of their changing reality. Because the old ways of understanding are inadequate to explain peoples' lived experiences during a crisis, we have openings to challenge dominant narratives. But we can only do that if we have clarity on the story we need to tell and clear ways to get that story out to the people who need to hear it. That story needs to connect to the ways in which people are experiencing the crisis and offer a narrative that connects those experiences to the bold reforms that we are advancing. If we miss this opening to consolidate a new story to make meaning of the moment, people will fall back into old narratives based on fear, scarcity and division.

**Build power:** During moments of crisis, our organisations can grow much more rapidly than in normal times. In a crisis, huge numbers of people are open to stepping out of their daily routines and getting involved in social change efforts. We need a plan to quickly build mass mobilisations so we can both inform what happens and absorb the individuals who become involved.

**Build a bigger 'we':** In moments of crisis, our organisations can quickly move into much stronger positions of leadership. Changing circumstances can encourage us to build alliances with other organisations that had previously been distant or even antagonistic to us. We can also move beyond primarily leading our own communities to leading much broader sections of society.

**Plan for backlash and heightened risk:** When we challenge power structures and the status quo, we need to expect backlash in the form of threats, hostile narratives, criminalisation and repression. It is vital that we integrate strategies for safety, both individual and collective, physical and digital, into our organising for social change. The toll and strain of pushing for change, also requires attention to care for our hearts, minds and bodies.

See JASS' toolkit on collective protection and wellbeing: [Our Rights, Our Safety](#).



**For everything we want to do, we must first be well-organised"**

**– Bettina Cruz**

## Theme 4:

### Building and Exercising Power

Building and exercising our power is an essential part of movement-building. Many attribute social and political change to heroes (think of Rosa Parks or Wangari Maathai) as if they spontaneously stood up to injustice in unexpected moments, or to hashtags that appear out of nowhere to galvanise people. These lone-hero narratives render invisible all the organising and power-building that enabled such leaders to speak truth to power. ‘The Arab Spring’ of the early 2010s, for example, is often attributed to a handful of social media activists and a hashtag, ignoring the many years of organising by trade unions, women’s groups, students and others that preceded that uprising. In the US and beyond, media stories about #MeToo credit Hollywood celebrities for kicking off a movement when, in truth, the more recent mobilisations are built upon decades of workplace organising by women workers, feminists, and allies around the globe.

Building power – the process of generating *power within*, *power to*, *power with* and *power for* – involves a range of strategies that interlink the individual and the collective, leadership-building and organising, networking and defining shared visions, narratives, and agendas.

Over time, investing in movement infrastructure enables organised, decentralised action at multiple levels by a vast network of connected leaders, activists, groups, institutions, unions, think tanks, media endeavours, people who care, and, in some contexts, political parties.

Building coalitions and connections is not easy because of polarised politics and distrust, and all the different ways that structural discrimination, prejudice, and power over play out between us. How we lead, support, and respect the leadership of others can build trust and effective collaboration. If ignored, the power imbalances inherent in differences (such as lived experience, class, race-ethnicity, gender, and sexuality) create conflict and prevent coming together. Forging authentic and intersectional connections across different organisations and communities, however, can create strong alliances and more powerful agendas.



## ACTIVITY 6:

### What generates transformative power?

**Materials:** Large copies or hand-drawn versions of *Transformative power* and *Movement ecosystem graphics*, coloured cards

**Plenary:** Ask:

- From your experience, what strategies and processes generate and build power within, *power to*, *power with*, and *power for*?

Ask people to write short answers on coloured cards and cluster them on the Transformative power graphic.

**Small groups:** People self-select or divide according to forms of transformative power. Take turns telling stories that illustrate what you've seen and experienced regarding your form of transformative power. Choose one example to act out in a five-minute skit.

**Plenary:** Groups present their skit. After each one, discuss:

- What does the skit tell us about what it takes to build this kind of transformative power? Any 'aha' moments?
- How do the different forms of power contribute to building power overall? How do we know?
- How do these transformative power strategies strengthen the wider movement ecosystem?

Refer to *Strategies for transformative power* and select examples to discuss further.

## Strategies for transformative power

Type of power	Processes that build individual and collective power
<i>Power within</i>	<p>Safe spaces to be ourselves and confront internalised oppression, power, and privilege amongst us</p> <p>Telling stories and learning from lived experience</p> <p>Healing and heart–mind–body processes that acknowledge trauma and enable us to care for ourselves</p> <p>Building critical consciousness</p> <p>Recovery and practice of cultural rituals that affirm shared identity and values</p> <p>Music, artistic expression, dancing</p> <p>Somatic work</p> <p>Belonging and common ground</p>
<i>Power to</i>	<p>Leadership development and skills</p> <p>Learning by doing e.g. leading a meeting, speaking in public</p> <p>Taking action together to solve problems</p> <p>Speaking out on behalf of others and oneself</p> <p>Gaining new knowledge, gathering information and research</p> <p>Exposing injustice</p> <p>Recovery and practice of cultural rituals</p> <p>Practices that support well-being and groundedness</p> <p>Mobilised actions together</p>
<i>Power with</i>	<p>Organising and building relationships of trust and common purpose</p> <p>Taking collective action to solve problems, including direct action</p> <p>Shared power analysis</p> <p>Developing a shared vision, common values, and proposals or demands</p> <p>Creating organisational structures that validate different capacities and leadership</p> <p>Rituals affirming a shared identity and dignity</p> <p>Humour, dancing, music, and joyful connection</p> <p>Conflict negotiation</p> <p>Common narratives that bring together different ways of thinking</p>
<i>Power for</i>	<p>Imagining a different and just future</p> <p>Creating alternative models</p> <p>Developing clear proposals and demands for change</p> <p>Making values explicit and putting them into practice in an organisation</p> <p>Slogans, messaging, stories, and narratives that project a perspective that challenges power</p>



## ACTIVITY 7:

### What blocks or generates collective power?

**Materials:** Flipchart with stickies/markers. Copies of handout: *Organising vs mobilising*.

**Plenary:** Experience and history demonstrate what prevents people from coming together and what helps people to converge.<sup>1</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4: Intersectionality, systems of oppression within movements can undermine organising effort while, by contrast, political choices and commitments can build equitable, aligned relationships for greater impact.

**Small groups:** Discuss, with examples:

- What undermines or creates conflict in our movement formations, communities or organisations when we work together to address issues?
- How can our differences in terms of identity and life experience create conflict or confusion?
- What kinds of behaviour, approaches and ways of working across differences enable us to work together better and feel stronger?

Prepare a five-minute skit or a group drawing to share with the whole group, dramatising two scenarios. what undermines and what enables coming together.

**Plenary:** Groups present their skits or drawings. Invite discussion after each one. Once all the groups have presented, together identify and name the enabling and undermining features. Note responses in two labelled columns:

- What prevents or undermines coming together and building our power?
- What enables us to come together for change?

Discuss each point on the list drawing from experience and examples.

Distil a list of the essentials for building collective power. Each person notes one essential factor that they feel needs attention in their organisation or group on a sticky and posts it on a separate flipchart or virtual board.

Distribute the handout: *Organising vs mobilising* and take a moment to read it. Discuss:

- What is the difference between organising and mobilising? How are they connected?
- What are some examples of ways that people have organised or mobilised to create change?
- What can activists do differently to support either organising or mobilising?

Draw out the differences between organising and mobilising and discuss why this matters. to *Strategies for transformative power* and select examples to discuss further.



What prevents or undermines our coming together and building our power?	What enables us to come together for change?
Lack of clear goals and shared values	Shared vision, values, and goals – a common problem or enemy
Lack of clarity about plans and actions	Clear sense of purpose and actions
Not having a voice, not being seen, being silenced and undervalued	Recognition of multiple leadership roles and opportunities to grow
Sexism, racism/anti-blackness, homophobia, classism, ageism, and so on. Treating everyone as if they were ‘the same’. Overt and less overt ways of excluding, embarrassing, invisibilising, silencing.	Creating safe space to address and recognise how differences are shaped by systemic power and result in levels power and privilege. Making political commitments to build equitable, inclusive spaces and leadership.
No space for disagreement or dealing with conflicts	Acknowledgement of differences and space to discuss and continuously refresh common ground and connections amid disagreements
Lack of transparency and clarity about how decisions are made and about resources	Being clear and transparent about how decisions are made and what resources are available
Top down and strict hierarchies	Tapping into multiple sources of knowledge
Relentless pace, lack of recognition, and unclear expectations	Space for rest, reflection, recognition, and renewal of commitment
Cliques and in-groups	Joy, rituals, dancing, creativity
Infiltration and divisiveness	A sense of belonging

See more tools, approaches, and ideas about building collective power, organising, and dealing with conflict in [We Rise: Building Up](#) and Chapter 17 in *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics*, pg. 320-324 on conflict.



Over time, feminist movement-building connects and strengthens groups of people whose collaboration fosters skilled activist leadership, organised capacity for sustained action, and the building of movement infrastructure. These kinds of interconnected relationships and shared commitments are the bedrock of collective power”.

- Shereen Essof<sup>9</sup>

## Organising vs mobilising

People often conflate organising with mobilising.<sup>1</sup> While they are connected, they demand different strategies.

- **Organising** means bringing people together to find common ground around a shared injustice and problems. Through dialogue (or popular and political education process), they build political relationships and consider solutions that become a specific demand or forward-looking agenda over time. Organising happens in phases. It might start with loose formations but ultimately seeks to widen, multiply, and diversify the people who come together through alliances and networks with a sense of belonging, shared vision, and values that are key to movements. Organising can happen face-to-face or – especially in dangerous contexts – virtually or both. Many activists frame the challenge of organising as “How do we build our base or constituency?”
- **Mobilising** refers to sets of actions taken to activate and expand supporters through outreach to garner attention and to pressure for change using the power of numbers and virtual as well as face-to-face actions.

Mobilising tends to be short-term and tactical while organising means investing in leadership and skills, including the capacity to mobilise.

**Organising isn’t rocket science, but it is a serious skill and a craft. A good organising conversation [is] 70% listening and 30% talking. It is not Facebooking, it is not tweeting ... those are mobilising tools.”**

- Jane MacAlvey and Michael R, Jacobin.<sup>2</sup>



We can’t lose connection to the human part of this work: our human connections and humanity. The worst is when we feel alone and isolated. A call, a conversation matters. Alliances matter. We are not alone. We are all connected.”

- Miriam Miranda, Honduran activist

## Theme 5: Engaging and Resisting

Policy and legal advocacy – focused on visible power – tend to dominate public perceptions about how change happens. In many contexts, engaging with, reforming, and using the mechanisms of formal decision-making – whether through government, corporate, civil society, trade union, or religious structure (among many other examples) – remains a critical tool for influencing and changing power.

Policy and advocacy efforts may be strategic in specific moments or contexts, but not always. Some movements choose not to get involved in formal lobbying or advocacy directed at governments and to focus instead on shifting power in other arenas, such as generating new narratives, investing in political education that challenges the dominant norms and beliefs of invisible power, building their own alternatives, creating autonomous communities – self-defined and self-governing groups – or resisting through protests, marches and occupations. For example:

- Occupy Wall Street activists in the US and beyond chose to disengage from policy work because addressing inequality was not even on the policy agenda in any meaningful way. Their goal was to use a visible encampment in the midst of the financial district in New York city to expose the realities of who capitalism serves (the 1%) – and rally the 99% to get economic inequality and justice on the agenda.<sup>12</sup>
- Autonomous actions and spaces organised by activists and movements have produced liberated zones and sovereign communities throughout history, such as the anarchist collectives in Spain and the Zapatistas in Southern Mexico, various kinds of commons and communitarian governance, workers' collectives, and self-defined solidarity economies and community spaces. Autonomous community-building has led to policy change and state engagement through smart media and narrative strategies such as in the cases of the Zapatistas, Cooperation Jackson in the US, the transboundary indigenous water governance in the Coast Salish Sea, and the Arvari River Parliament in India.
- In the case study PEKKA: *Marginalised women organise in Indonesia*, autonomous spaces became the foundation for building cooperatives that enabled women to organise and gain collective economic and political influence.

A key element of strategy is to determine if, how, and when to engage with visible power. However, not all opportunities to engage are strategic. Numerous other manuals detail how to conduct lobbying and advocacy. Here, we offer tools for deciding whether to engage, and also when to resist – either instead of engaging, or in a combination through 'inside-outside' strategies.



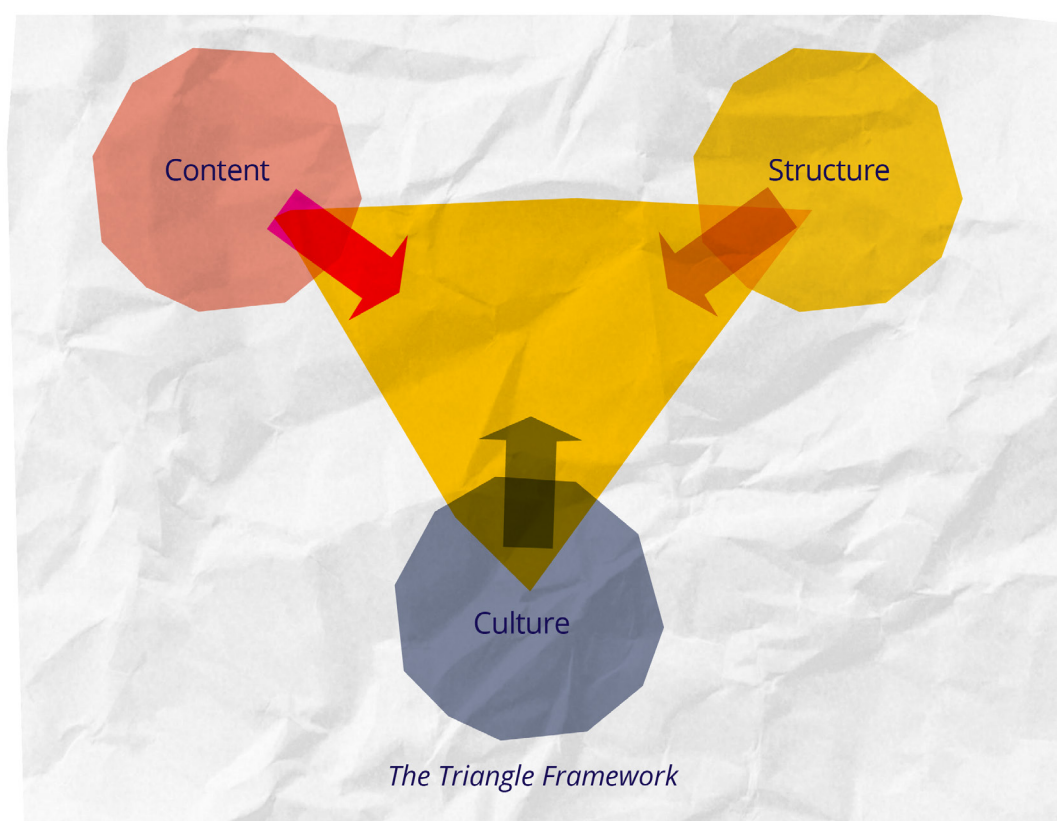
**Revolution cannot happen without reform — new structures, processes and relationships of power cannot exist absent direct challenges to the current structure."**

*- Alice Garza, from Black Lives Matter in the US, co-founder of the Movement for Black Lives, political strategist, author, and freedom dreamer.<sup>13</sup>*

Aligning advocacy strategies with mass mobilisations can create pressure on decision-makers and shift narratives so that allies 'on the inside' can highlight the costs of inaction and create more receptivity, making lobbying easier. 'Inside-outside strategies' combine actions within the halls of power and outside the doors simultaneously. The combination of street action and social media, for example, can turn up the heat on political and economic decisionmakers and forces.

### The Triangle Framework

This three-way analysis guides where and how to focus visible power strategies. It divides visible power into two domains – Content and Structure – and considers how these are influenced by Culture, the invisible power of norms and beliefs. This framework overlaps in some ways with the four arenas of power. It is taken from VeneKlasen, Lisa and Valerie Miller, (2002), *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics*, Practical Action Publishing, pgs. 170-174.



**Content:** what's written in and what's deliberately left out of laws, policies, budgets, and the rules, and who are the people in charge of making those rules. Bias and discrimination are reinforced by what's there and what's not there when rights aren't recognised, and by who gets to decide.

**Structure:** the interpretation, implementation, and enforcement, of those rules by judges, police, military, legislators, civil servants and managers – the people and institutions responsible for implementing the rules, regulations and standards, along with their enforcement mechanisms and implementers. All too often, these are biased and serve the interests of those in power. This is why many organisations seek to retrain judges and police as part of their change strategies. Holding

decisionmakers to account is critical, to ensure that policies are created and implemented in a way that serves the people most affected. Even when a decent law exists, biased police or judges serving the interests of those in power tend to reinforce injustice.

**Culture:** the norms, values, beliefs and traditions that can either justify or upend inequality and injustice. Artistic and creative expressions – music, art, dance – can mirror, reinforce, or disrupt these beliefs.

By precisely locating how the Content and the Structure contribute to injustice – and potentially, to addressing a key aspect of that injustice – the triangle can help sharpen strategies that engage and use visible or formal power for change.

The framework is a reminder that changing laws and elections – examples of strategies to reform governments – can advance our justice values without fundamentally shifting the underlying norms and beliefs that uphold power. Integral aspects of engaging visible power, therefore, can include narratives that affirm our power together, educating and organising people to claim their rights, and demanding that the system treat people with dignity and fairness.

	How and where does this contribute to the problem or situation? (local, national, regional, global)	How and where might you make change for justice and toward a solution?	What is needed for an effective strategy? (allies, information, skills, clout)
<b>Content</b> Laws, policies and rules (is a right or harm not specified?)			
<b>Structure</b> Enforcement mechanisms (courts, commissions, management, boards, police, etc)			
<b>Culture</b> Beliefs, norms, ideologies, narratives.			



## ACTIVITY 8:

### Triangle analysis

This optional activity is most useful for those seeking to engage with visible power/formal decision-making structures through advocacy and lobbying around a clearly defined agenda and problem. It benefits from an earlier power analysis, pinpointing how visible power shapes the problem being addressed and can also contribute to its solution, including identifying key actors and decisionmakers.

**Materials:** Previous power analyses of issues people are working on and examples of visible power. Handout: *The triangle framework*.

**Plenary:** Briefly review the meanings of visible, hidden, invisible and systemic power. Focus in particular on visible power – the formal rules and decision-making structures of any institution and space, such as governments, civil society organisations, churches, mosques, corporations, the stock market, and the internet. Every organised place and space has its written rules and ‘deciders’ and its hidden and invisible power dynamics as well. Remind people how ‘culture’ or invisible power affects the implementation or passage of laws and policies that deal with inequality, violence, and rights.

Recall or brainstorm the kinds of strategies needed to engage visible power. Examples discussed earlier in this Guide include:

- Elections and appointments
- Lawsuits
- Law and policy reform
- Shadow reports
- Educating judges and police
- Budget advocacy
- Documenting and denouncing violations of rights

Introduce and discuss the handout and address any questions.

**Small groups:** Each group creates a grid with three columns on flipchart paper. Use this to explore the issue or case study.

Cluster responses to the questions in the grid, with reference to the triangle. Since visible power dynamics and forces play out at local, national, regional and global levels, identify the levels in your case and use different colours or stickies to illustrate each.

**Plenary:** Groups report back and everyone takes a ‘gallery walk’ to examine each others’ grids.

Discuss key takeaways about strategies to engage, reform, and exercise visible power. To deepen discussion, ask:

- What are some of the key strategies and opportunities for engaging and using visible power?
- What are some of the ingredients that make ‘engage and reform’ strategies work?

Draw on, share, and add to the handout: *When and how to engage visible power*.



## Spaces of power: when and where to engage or resist?

All spaces where policy decisions and issues are being discussed are political and contested. When people, activists, and civil society groups are invited by officials to 'engage' in formal policy processes, it's worth assessing whether and how to do so, and when to consider the power of claiming and creating autonomous spaces.

Policy engagement may not make sense as the most strategic use of your resources and time in all moments and contexts. Being strategic is not simply a question of whether you can impact policy or its enforcement. Sometimes, engaging with global, state, corporate, civic or religious actors can be an opportunity for new alliances, gathering information, gaining clout or shifting the agenda. But is it worth the necessary investment in resources, preparation, and credibility to engage in these spaces? What other spaces can be claimed, created or strengthened to build your power and influence?

For the past few decades, activists have used versions of this framework to assess the different kinds of policy and political spaces they can engage in or create to effect change.<sup>14</sup> The framework helps groups to analyse the potential opportunities and entry points for engagement and resistance in terms of how decisions are made and whether participation is 'strategic' in four kinds of spaces<sup>15</sup>.

### Spaces of Power: When and where to engage or resist?

**A closed space** is controlled by an elite group of decisionmakers by virtue of their position or appointment; it is usually neither transparent nor open to public participation. Examples include legislative committees, councils, and spaces for making security, trade, and corporate policy.

**Strategic considerations:** Are the decisions made in this space vital to your change agenda? Can this space be influenced through advocacy, shareholder or electoral campaigns? Is it possible to use exposure strategies (revealing leaked information) or to mobilise outside pressure and resistance to demand transparency or participation?

**An invited space** is created by policymakers who want to engage civil society groups (under pressure or for other reasons) in consultation. Usually, the agenda, who participates and how remains tightly controlled. Policymakers can use these spaces for meaningful input but more often to create a veneer of legitimacy and democracy. Examples include the UN climate talks, Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) annual meetings, and participatory processes at different levels convened by public or private agencies.

**Strategic considerations:** Considering the financial costs of participating in a policy space (including preparation), will the opportunity strengthen relationships with insiders, advance the agenda, create an opportunity to build alliances, educate leaders on the process, and/or move your agenda forward? When activists choose to participate, their presence may be as useful or more so to the powerholders convening the space than to the activists themselves or their agenda. Will your agenda be co-opted for a purpose that you don't support? Conversely, however, it can be useful to gather information, network, and gain visibility and voice in an invited space.

**A claimed space**, by contrast, is created by civil society or informal groups specifically to challenge and question the legitimacy of a closed or invited space and in order to engage with decision-makers around the civic group's agenda, not that of decision-makers. Examples are a parallel conference or an autonomous space with or alongside a UN conference, the COP meetings, the World Economic Forum (Davos), or other officially convened processes.

**Strategic considerations:** Will the strategies to claim a parallel space communicate clearly to decision-makers that their agenda and their engagement with civil society is inadequate? Will a claimed space help build your alliances and consensus around demands and propositions and serve as leverage in advocacy and strategic communications aimed at the policy process you're claiming space from? Can you invite some decisionmakers to join you?

**Created spaces** are autonomous spaces defined by civil society, such as the World Social Forum or local or national alliances where the agenda and who participates are entirely in the hands of activists and change makers. These are spaces in which to exchange ideas, build solidarity, and forge common visions, values and agendas to connect movements and change makers across borders informally and formally.

**Strategic considerations:** Is this a moment in which we face such great divisive forces and siloing that we need to shift our resources and energy to creating our own spaces in order to forge an alternative agenda for the future? Can we create and sustain our own processes of alliances and resistance while also influencing and engaging with formal power-holders?

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### **Key strategies and opportunities to 'engage and use' visible power include:**

- Litigation
- Lobbying and advocacy to change laws
- Elections and appointments of key decision-makers, judges, commissioners, etc.
- Media strategies to expose corruption and make the case
- Generating alternative research and policy proposals
- Utilising commissions to make the case
- Action research and participatory consultations around laws, referenda, etc.
- Pressing for accountability and funding for existing laws or policies
- Budget tracking
- Training and 'sensitising' civil servants, managers, or implementers
- Using regional and global human rights mechanisms to draw attention to violations and expose abuses, create pressure

When the context is too risky to directly challenge actors at the local or country level, exposing the corporate actor or state actor by focusing on an angle involving the international financial institutions, bilateral agencies, and the UN human rights system.

### **Ingredients for successful 'engage and reform' strategies include:**

- Access and relationships with selected allies on the 'inside' of formal structures
- Allies with professional expertise (such as lawyers for litigation or policy advocates)
- Quality research to gather information (for example, participatory action research to raise awareness and organise communities, as well as generating information)
- A clear focus and case to be made, actionable by decision-makers
- Visibility and support from 'outside'
- Connections to journalists and effective digital and media strategies

- Targeting and putting pressure on international financial institutions or corporations that may be more sensitive to public exposure than national governments are
- Using human rights mechanisms and spaces for leverage and attention, and to build alliances

Even when focused on specific laws and policies, it is important to align the allies and strategies working on all the arenas of power simultaneously, in order to create pressure and build broader public support and constituencies. And as we will discuss later in this chapter, it is also important to keep in mind the need to consider other strategies of resistance and autonomous spaces.

Spaces of Power exist across many different levels, from the local to the global. [The Power Cube](#) is a useful three-dimensional tool for exploring the interaction of power, spaces, and levels, and the implications for joining up strategies for change across these dimensions.<sup>16</sup>

### ACTIVITY 9:

## To engage or not?

**Materials:** Handout: *When and how to engage visible power*

**Plenary:** Begin with an open discussion by asking:

- How do you determine whether or how to engage in policy or use legal strategies to advance your agenda?

Point out that many women's groups, for example, engage with the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York each year in March. Some have an explicit strategy to lobby governments on the content of resolutions and agendas, while the majority come to network with each other and donors.

- Is this a policy space that merits the costs of travel, hotels, and time?
- Can we claim and reshape existing political spaces to serve our goals? Or do we need to create our own political spaces that enable us to set the agenda, speak out, and focus on the most important questions for ourselves?

Invite people to name examples of lobbying and policy advocacy work they have been involved in or political spaces they have created. Select three or four examples to be examined in small groups. Introduce the framework Policy spaces: to engage or not? from the handout as a tool for assessing whether and how to engage in policy work.

**Small groups:** Each group addresses the questions in relation to a different example of policy advocacy. Alternatively, the group discusses their own experience.

- Assess the policy spaces you've engaged in: what was your purpose?
- Which of the spaces in the framework describes the space(s) you engaged in, and why?
- What were you able to accomplish in the space(s)?
- What kinds of strategies might each space require to be strategic?

**Plenary:** Groups present their analysis for discussion.

Go on to explore what lessons or insights can be applied to other policy engagement opportunities. Distil the key considerations for deciding how and whether to engage, using this checklist:

- What are the opportunities to shape the agenda in the space?
- If engaging, what difference will this make for advancement of your strategy?
- If there isn't much opportunity to shape the space or policy,
- How will the space enable relationship-building among activists, donors and/or with decisionmakers?
- Will there be an opportunity for activists and leaders to learn new skills and gather new information?
- Is this an opportunity to gain legitimacy and visibility for your agenda, organisations and leaders?
- What is the opportunity cost of not engaging? What could you do instead given the resources?
- What is the cost-benefit analysis?
- If you decide to engage, who are the most important power-holders in the space, and how can you build or utilise your connection with them?
- What do you want to achieve and what would be success in terms of the visibility + legitimacy of your agenda and demands, of your alliances and relationships, or your positioning for future advocacy?
- Who should represent your initiative and what will it take to ensure that whomever leads is fully briefed, equipped and supported to ensure learning and confidence?
- What kinds of materials will you need to draw attention to your agenda in the space?
- How do you ensure that there is adequate preparation and follow up?



### **Xinka indigenous people's inside-outside strategies**

This indigenous community from southeastern Guatemala oppose the Escobal silver mine, the world's second largest silver deposit. The mining of silver has polluted water and soil and displaced whole communities in the region. Xinka organisations have allied with rural farmers, other indigenous organisations, and human rights groups to defend their rights, land, and water. It has been [a bloody struggle with the killing and detention of activists](#).

With the signature of the Peace Accords in 1996, the Xinka were finally recognised as one of the four Peoples in Guatemala. (The others are Mayan, Garifuna, and Meztizo.) Their political-cultural strategy involved years of community education and rituals to reclaim their own history and identity, while the legal dimensions of their struggle involved lawyers and human rights experts. Recognition as indigenous people entitled them to the rights under ILO Resolution 169 to free, prior, and informed consent on their land, an essential tool in their struggle against the massive mine.

The Xinka trace their history back hundreds of years in Guatemala. In recent decades, they have built their organising power with allies and advocated for formal legal recognition as indigenous people. At the forefront of the struggle is the Xinka Parliament, representing more than 200,000 indigenous people across 13 communities in southern Guatemala. Women leaders play a major role. As they put their lives on the line in the blockades, Xinka women also organise within their communities and movements to challenge traditional gender roles and gender-based violence.



The Xinka first achieved a ruling from the Guatemalan Constitutional Court that suspended mining operations until the government could undertake a consultation process consistent with ILO Convention 169. Initially, the Xinka Parliament was excluded from the consultation process, but the Xinka combined a women-led direct action with a legal strategy to temporarily block the mine, while resetting the conditions to ensure a robust consultation and consent process.

In late 2020, they succeeded in securing a commitment from the government to recognise their 59 delegates. The Xinka-led consultation process – in the context of attacks by mining security and police – relied on the collaboration of outside experts but was designed to strengthen their leadership and organisation in addition to generating evidence to make their case. The evidence showed toxicity in the water and soil that is affecting health and undermining the fruit production that Xinka depend on.<sup>17</sup>

## ACTIVITY 10:

### Inside–outside strategies

**Materials:** Handout – either Xinka indigenous people’s inside–outside strategies or COPINH: Guardians of the River in Honduras.

**Plenary:** Moving an agenda forward often demands a combination of engagement with formal decision-making and pressure created by mass mobilisation and other forms of resistance and protest. Referred to as inside-outside or ‘sandwich strategies’<sup>18</sup>, they demand careful coordination and planning between different types of organisations and leaders with different orientations and capacities.

Invite people to reflect on their experience with advocacy. Ask:

- What does it take to be heard and get to the table of decision-making or have your demands considered? And – more specifically:
- What kinds of actions and steps were essential, in order to be taken seriously by decision makers?
- What skills, resources, and alliances did that take?
- What were some of the biggest challenges?
- What tensions existed between groups working inside the halls of power and groups mobilising outside? What are some of the ways to overcome them?

**Small groups:** Read the case study and discuss:

- What do you learn about visible power and engagement strategies from this example?
- What are the main distinctions between the legal strategies and the mobilisation strategies? How are they interdependent?
- What are the limitations and success factors involved?

**Plenary:** Groups share their insights from the short case. Points to note:

- The importance of gaining formal recognition of rights as leverage and the limits of those rights when power is intent on its agenda.



- The mix of alliances – including outside expertise in service to the community – as a critical dimension of defending rights in the visible arena.
- Political organising and a shared sense of identity and history as the foundation for a long-term strategy and mobilising and sustaining a struggle that has many layers.
- Gathering information and analysis as a strategy for organising and leadership development for the community, not only the domain of outside professionals.
- The recognition over time and through conversation of political differences, unique roles, and interdependence between groups that focus on lobbying inside the halls of power and those that mobilise outside.

Draw from your own experience to emphasise the importance of aligning inside and outside strategies.



The election of these candidates is often incorrectly described as a shift from protest to policy. We did not leave the streets for the ballot box — we found the power at the intersection of those tactics. The same organisers who mobilised thousands in defense of Black lives built strong enough campaigns to shift the consciousness of an electorate, and voters showed up at the polls to fuel the election of aligned candidates”.

– *Kayla Reed and Blake Strobe*<sup>19</sup>



We mobilize “the struggle in the street to make demands in moments when the structures of the state and power did not listen to us... but they [protest and policy advocacy] shouldn’t be divided by differences in strategy”.

– *Berta Cáceres, 2015*

## ACTIVITY 11:

### Why and how to resist

Resistance strategies are an essential part of transforming power. Blockades, protests, marches, boycotts, strikes, and occupations are just a few examples of 'direct action' to physically impede or expose abuses of power while creating pressure on formal power to advance your agenda and shape public debate.

Not all resistance strategies are direct action, however. Creating autonomous initiatives that embody just, regenerative propositions and values (like the Zapatistas in Mexico, for example) can also be resistance, as can small acts of rebellion or 'crossing the line'. Acts of autonomy and rebellion can be powerful ways of communicating an alternative, or what has been called 'the threat of a good example'. History is full of examples of washer women or mothers stopping their 'invisible' care work as a form of resistance. In recent years, influential resistance strategies – the five-month movement mobilisation in Guatemala to stop a coup, Podemos in Spain, and Occupy Wall Street in the US – utilised strategic communications and social media to ramp up their outside influence in order to disrupt or change the narrative, and create public pressure for change. 'Outside strategies' – coordinated street and virtual action – can turn up the heat and pressure policymakers to take action.

**Materials:** Sticky notes, handout: *The basics of resistance and direct action*

**Small groups:** Reflect on your own experience with resistance strategies or that of a group you know of. Alternatively, discuss one of the case studies.

- Describe examples of resistance. What was the action? What were some of the key elements (for example, the number of people, target, and messages)?
- What motivated this resistance?
- What were some of the challenges?
- What was achieved?

Note one-word answers on coloured stickies – a different colour each for *Why? Challenges? Impact?*

**Plenary:** Each group shares examples and posts their sticky notes. Bring out additional examples from the handout. Conclude by discussing the multiple purposes and key characteristics of resistance strategies.



## Basics of resistance and direct action

Non-violent direct action is mobilised when (for example):

- Powerful interests or decisionmakers are not responding or listening to opposition or demands for change
- A grave injustice, abuse, political attacks, and/or violence are taking place and no one seems to be stopping them
- Unchecked corruption and abuse by dominant interests need to be exposed

Effective strategies to mobilise resistance<sup>20</sup> include:

- Prior organising to ensure a significant number of people are involved
- Creative actions and messages, including costuming and performance
- A clear target and objective
- Shared specific demands
- Many different opportunities for a variety of people and organisations to be involved, lead, be visible, engage, and connect with each other
- Only a few, short speeches at any event, with more elements such as music for collective energy
- Adequate resources and support for advance organising and logistics
- Affirmation that “we’re in this together”
- Actions and ways of working that communicate an alternative narrative
- Diverse organisations and leaders working in alliance
- Virtual and in-person actions in coordination
- A through risk and safety plan to provide protection and legal support, in person and digital
- A shared analysis and awareness of possible backlash, violence, and repercussions

In closed and highly repressive regimes, decentralised and invisible ways of connecting and acting are essential.

### ACTIVITY 12:

#### Actions around the world

**Materials:** Compile photos and brief explanations of resistance and protest actions from around the world and/or locally, recent or from history. A few examples are provided here, but add your own.

Alternatively, ask two or three resource persons or group members to prepare 10-minute stories of their experiences in resistance and protest action. Each story should include a photograph or video and explain:

- What was the strategy or action? Why? What were the goals?
- Who was involved and how was it organised?
- What were the key features of the action?
- What were the demands and messages?
- What challenges and risks were foreseen, unexpected, and/ or mitigated?
- What different kinds of impact resulted from this action

**Plenary:** Introduce the examples or resource people. After the presentations, invite discussion. Compare key features and differences.

Alternatively, give out photographs of examples of protest, resistance, or direct action, together with background information or links. People discuss (possibly in small groups or pairs):

- What is happening in this photo? What is the context and why is it happening?
- What does the image communicate?
- Which image feels most moving or inspiring to you, and why?
- What level of risk was involved, do you think?



## Stories and images of resistance



*Protests against a military dictatorship and coup in Myanmar*

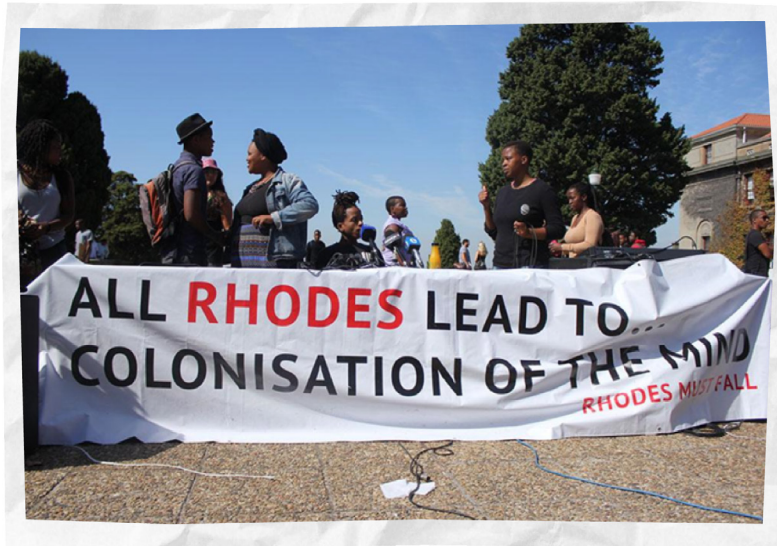
In 2021, the military seized power and clamped down on dissent in Myanmar, jailing and killing dozens of activists. Led by young people, millions mobilised to protest, using creative ways to protect against and block violence. The 3 fingers is inspired by the series *The Hunger Games*, communicating that the people must rise up against their oppressors.



*#NiUnaMenos #NotOneLess and the Ola Verde Green Wave*



Beginning in Argentina and spreading across the continent, a series of creative and potent street protests, slogans, and messaging made this movement viral and global. Initially a protest against femicide and unchecked gender violence, it evolved into a powerful public health, reproductive justice, and abortion rights agenda that contributed to the legalisation of abortion in Argentina in 2019. Green scarves and the colour green have become symbolic and present in abortion-access mobilisations worldwide.



*Rhodes Must Fall – Fees Must Fall –  
Patriarchy Must Fall*

Student-led mobilisations in universities in South Africa initially demanded the decolonisation of the curriculum, which was still dominated by white and European history and academia (Cecil Rhodes was a prominent coloniser and founding leader of Rhodesia.) It quickly evolved into a protest against the privatisation of public education and increased fees. Women then protested male dominance and violence not only in the structures of the university but within the emerging movement itself.



*Black Lives Matter*

#BlackLivesMatter is a slogan that connected dozens of mobilisations in 2013 in response to the acquittal in the US of the person who murdered 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. Hundreds of organisations rose up against white supremacy and racist policing. The Movement for Black Lives grew in scale and strength in the aftermath of police murders of other Black people, including George Floyd. The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) is a global platform of many organisations and individuals within and beyond the US combating and countering acts of violence, improving lives, and creating space for Black joy and innovation.

## Winning and building

Movement strategy is fundamentally about addressing problems of injustice and inequality step by step, move by move, while always building and amplifying the power of ‘we’. Many times on the long road to justice, we can feel paralysed and discouraged by the scale and persistence of what we’re up against. This is especially true for those at the frontline of struggles in times of crises. Like the activists in Myanmar fighting a military dictatorship or in Hong Kong where a vibrant youth-led movement is now underground and in exile. Like COPINH and Berta Cáceres as they struggled to defend the Gualcarque River over many years.

Despite all of our organising efforts and that of our ancestors before us, sometimes our past gains are visibly eroded as we face new and greater forces of backlash and co-optation. Think of the long struggle for bodily autonomy and reproductive justice that feminists, LGBTQI and HIV+ people have waged, often with little support from other social justice allies. Imagine centuries of racial justice and anti-racist efforts to expose white supremacy and reform deadly policing, politics, and policies.

Winning takes many forms but win we must. We can’t forget that we build movements to win – to stop harms, reform the system, and chip away at root causes of violent systems inside and out. What does winning look like? In a repressive dictatorship, a simple collective gesture that says “We are still here together” provides a glimmer of hope. In a more open context, it might be stopping a bad policy or it might be a street mobilisation amplified by viral social media. How do we affirm our incremental ‘wins’ and recognise that staying the course against tough odds is winning?

In most contexts, winning also involves contesting for and building ‘governing power’ which refers to more than getting our allies elected or appointed, although those can represent significant change.<sup>21</sup> Governing power – the core of visible power — involves changing the people, culture and structures of decision-making and politics to be more deeply democratic and inclusive. That’s a long-term strategy.<sup>22</sup>



**Governing power is the ability to (1) win and sustain power within multiple arenas of decision-making so as to (2) shift the power structure of governance and (3) establish a new common sense of governing... To win governing power, we need the capacity to design, drive demand for, legislate, enforce and defend a structural reform agenda that serves the interests of our people (rather than the wealthy few). This requires us to reshape the structure of the government itself, so that it can advance democratic control, redistribution and reparation”.**

*– Harmony Goldberg and Dan McGrath, Grassroots Power Project<sup>22</sup>*

Strategy is often misunderstood in a narrow sense as the setting of goals for leadership and plans, or in terms of activities, campaigns, and advocacy efforts to support the achievement of these goals. While it can certainly help organisations with their priorities, strategy is so much more than this. When it grows from a deep shared analysis of the multiple dimensions of power – and of the widely discussed and understood potential for resisting, building, and transforming power within a wider movement ecosystem – strategy is the very heart of making change happen.



Each arena of power (visible, hidden, invisible, and systemic) is not simply a form of domination or power over but a dynamic, contested terrain with its own logic and potential for transformative action. Power analysis reveals the tensions and contestations within each arena, the openings and ‘cracks where the light comes in’, and the possibilities for building our own transformative power. When pursued together, power analysis and strategy are our trusted guide to change-making, helping us see when and where to expose, resist, engage, organise, educate, narrate, communicate, network, and imagine and create a better world.



We discern that the urge of the times is not to fix a broken system, but to acknowledge our inherent power to summon other worlds.

“We know a way. Our cultures teach us that in turning to each other, we become disruptive to old realities and hospitable to new ones. Because we will not co-create the world by proxy, we need to turn to ourselves again and rekindle the realness we have lost. ... In these human-scaled circles of rejuvenation, we will weave a new social fabric; a new world will be a tantalisingly present and dynamic reality, not a distant ideal. In these places of ‘vulnerability’, we will reclaim a terrain that is free from the paralysing influences of NGO-speak and politics.

“This is not about conventional movements. We envision a meta-network, a new politics of engagement that draws in the non-activist and activist and helps them recognise the power they already are”.

– Bayo Akomolafe<sup>23</sup>

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1. [Building the Movement Infrastructure We Need in This Moment](#), Movement Catalyst, Medium. January 25, 2021,
  2. adrienne maree brown, 2017. *Emergent Strategy*. Edinburgh, Scotland: AK Press.
  3. Executive Director of Political Action Research, researcher and strategist on confronting rising authoritarianism, quoted in JASS Dialogue [What Time is it on the Clock of the World](#), May 2023
  4. Bradley, A. (2020) ‘Did we forget about power? Reintroducing concepts of power for justice, equality and peace’, in R McGee and J. Pettit (eds), (2020), *Power, empowerment and social change*, Abingdon: Routledge.
  5. For more power-mapping tools, see *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics*, Chapters 11: Finding Hooks and Political Angles, and Chapter 12: Forces, Friends and Foes. Also, search on [We Rise](#).
  6. In a [2018 programme](#) at Barnard College’s Center for Research on Women. (Video.)
  7. Harmony Goldberg, Grassroots Power Project: [Stepping into the Moment: The Corona Crisis](#) in *Convergence*, April 8, 2020. The final point on backlash, safety, and risk is the authors’ addition.
  8. See “Sources and Uses of Power” in *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics*, pg. 42 and 56, and [Defining Power and its Sources](#) on We Rise.
  9. [2022 JASS Annual Report](#).
  10. Distinction attributed to Jane MacIlvey, US labor educator and organiser, in [Building a Revolutionary Movement](#).
  11. “The Big Difference Between Organising and Mobilising: How Unions Can Win in the Future” *Alternet*, October 21, 2015.
  12. [The Art of Non-Violence](#): The innovations and adaptations of Occupy Wall Street
  13. [Alicia Garza, The Left Should Double Down on Electoral Organizing](#), Photo By Citizen University – The Movement Moment – panel at CitizenUCon16, CC BY 3.0,
  14. Colleagues at IDS and activists who later built JASS began asking these questions in 2001 when the following concepts were developed to help advocates assess policy spaces and determine how and whether to engage. They are still relevant. See Brock, Karen, Andrea Cornwall and John Gaventa, *Power, Knowledge and Political Spaces in the Framing of Poverty Policy*, IDS WP 143, October 2001; also see “Assessing Entry Points” in *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics*, (2002/2007) by Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller, page 208.
  15. Adapted from *Making Change Happen2: Citizen Engagement and Global Economic Power*. Just Associates, 2006
  16. For more tools on power mapping, and choosing and framing issues, see *We Rise* and *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics*, Chapter 10: Policy Hooks and Political Angles, and Chapter 11: Forces, Friends and Foes.
  17. Jeff Abbott, *Women lead the struggle against mining and machismo in Guatemala*, Open Democracy (2015).
  18. For an explanation of ‘[sandwich strategies](#)’ see Jonathan Fox and the Accountability Research Centre.
  19. Kayla Reed and Blake Strode, “George Floyd and the Seeds of a New Kind of Activism”, *New York Times*, May 22, 2021
  20. See also “[198 methods of nonviolent action](#)”
  21. Recent examples (2024) where progressives gained governing power and are making a difference include Colombia, Chile, Honduras, etc.
  22. Harmony Goldberg and Dan McGrath, [Governing Power](#), Grassroot Power Project, September 22, 2023
  23. Bayo Akomolafe, [The Times are Urgent: Let’s Slow Down](#)