

## ACTIVITY 1:

## Demystifying narratives

This activity introduces and demystifies narratives as a strategy to contest for power. Participants reflect on:

- The ways in which narratives have shaped their own lives and perspectives.
- The impact that narratives have had on them.
- The messages, stories, and explanations within particular narratives.
- How narratives are communicated.
- Whose interests narratives serve.
- The deeper values, beliefs, and explanations they build on.

**Materials:** Handouts: What are narratives? and Dominant narratives, flipchart paper, markers

### Step 1: What does the word 'narrative' mean?

**Plenary:** We hear the word 'narratives' quite a bit, but what does it really mean, especially for social change and organising? Narratives are stories, explanations, and messages that make sense of and shape how we see the world and how we act in it. These stories may be positive visions of the politics, society, and future we hope for, or they may be manipulative, hateful, and dangerous, blocking change, distorting facts, provoking conflict, and reinforcing inequity and discrimination.

Introduce the activity with key points from the handout: *What are Narratives?* Brainstorm together in response to two questions:

1. What does the term 'narrative' mean to you?
2. Can you identify two examples of narratives that have shaped your view of the world and of your life, or the views of those around you?

Write meanings on one flipchart and examples on another. You could add prepared examples and definitions. Ask the group if they would like to add anything. Keep the flipcharts to use later.

### Step 2: What narratives have we experienced in our lives?

**Small groups:** In groups of five or six, participants brainstorm narratives that have shaped their lives, positively or negatively. Reflect together on the following questions and create a visual presentation on flipchart paper.

- What two or three narratives have shaped your own lives, positively or negatively?
- Choose one narrative that has been a *positive force or inspiration for change* in your lives, and one narrative that has been a negative force or obstacle to change.

For each of these two narratives, discuss:

- What impact has this narrative had on your lives?
- What are the key stories, messages, and explanations in this narrative?
- How have they been communicated and by whom?
- What deeper values, beliefs, and behaviour are they based on?

For one or both of these narratives, create a simple drawing or graphic, including keywords, to address the four questions.

### **Step 3: Sharing experiences of narratives**

**Plenary:** Groups post their flipcharts around the room. Everyone walks around to see what others have done. Invite a short presentation and discussion around each group's work. Ask:

- How did different groups respond to the four questions? Any similarities or differences?
- Is there a contrast between the positive and negative narratives?
- What other narratives did groups identify (if you did not present both)?

If groups shared all positive or all negative narratives, select and discuss a contrasting one.

Distribute the Dominant narratives handout. Adapt it to the context or make your own handout. Allow time for people to read it individually or in small groups. Invite discussion:

- Do any of the narratives shared by the groups resonate with those in the handout?
- Which of these dominant narratives do you experience in our lives, and how?
- Did you identify any positive or transformational narratives?
- If so, which dominant narratives do they challenge? How?

Conclude by clarifying together how we understand narratives; review definitions of narratives from the introductory brainstorm; and write down the group's agreed definition as a final output.