

# CHANGING THEIR WORLD

## CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

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2ND EDITION  
UPDATED WITH NEW CASE STUDY SUMMARIES  
NEW INTRODUCTION AND LESSONS LEARNED



Building  
Feminist  
Movements and  
Organizations

■ **AWID's Building Feminist Movements and Organizations (BEFMO) Initiative's publications can be found on the AWID website: [www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org)**

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1st Edition, by Srilatha Batliwala**

**Changing their World: Concepts and practices of women's movements  
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The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international feminist, membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights. AWID's mission is to strengthen the voice, impact and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women.

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## Introduction

The Building Feminist Movements and Organizations (BFEMO) Initiative was launched by AWID as part of its 2006-2012 strategic plan. The aim of the initiative was to advance our understanding of feminist movements and movement building in the current global context, and to apply that understanding to strengthening the capacity of women's organizations to better catalyze, support, and sustain movement building. In order to work toward this goal, we realized that two steps were essential.

First, we wanted to clarify our concept of movements, and especially of feminist movements. This seemed critical at a time when the term "movement" was being used very loosely, to describe virtually any collective endeavor by organizations and or individuals. We believed this was partly a product of the general de-politicization and cooption of social change and feminist language after they entered the development mainstream, similar to the way terms like empowerment and rights had been divested of their once-powerful meaning. We therefore thought it was important to restore both conceptual and political clarity by re-defining movements and tackling several related questions about them. For instance, what actually distinguishes movements from other kinds of collectives, networks, and campaigns? What is the difference between an organization and a movement? What are their roles and relationships with each other? And what distinguishes feminist movements from other social movements? All these questions were addressed and clarified in chapter one, "Clarifying Our Concepts".

Secondly, we felt it was important to analyze the experiences of strong and vibrant women's movements in different parts of the world, and understand how they evolved, strategized, and made an impact. We also wanted to explore the meaning and essence of feminist practice in movement building, and what feminist movements actually look like and how they act on the ground. We hoped such analysis would help us create a new conceptual framework that explicitly links organizational strengthening processes to movement building, from a feminist perspective.

So through 2007, the BFEMO initiative undertook ten case studies from different regions of the world that had mobilized women into strong movements that had made a difference. An underlying hope for the project was to give visibility to diverse expressions of women's organizing whose movement building experiences have traditionally not been part of mainstream women's movements. The selection of cases was therefore not necessarily done through some very scientific sampling process—rather, we used AWID's extensive membership network to identify emergent or new women's movements that would fulfill these criteria:

- Geographic spread (at least one movement from every major region);
- Thematic diversity (movements focusing on varied issues and interests of women);
- Diversity of women—movements that have been built by women of different identities; and
- Age—movements that were in existence for at least five years.

The case studies were undertaken by researchers identified by AWID's BFEMO team and our advisors in different regions (See Appendix 1 for a complete list of cases and authors). A case guideline was developed to obtain broadly comparative data on the origins, structures, strategies, and impacts of the movements. The studies were conducted and documented between July and December, 2007. Seeing the case studies powerfully come together by 2008 validated AWID's belief that some of the most interesting innovations and practices in movement building were actually being carried out within movements outside of mainstream women's movements. Upon completion, the case studies were made available in English, French, and Spanish on [www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org).



The first edition of *Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements* was launched, appropriately enough, at the 11th AWID International Forum on The Power of Movements, held in Cape Town, South Africa, in October 2008. In this first edition, Chapter Two presented brief summaries of the movement case studies. The concluding chapter, Lessons to Learn, presented key insights and important lessons emerging from the rich harvest of information in the cases.

However, we began to realize that despite the seeming diversity of movements covered in the first edition, there were still other categories of movements that were missing and that the strategies and analyses of these missing movements would add richness to the collection. For instance, the movements of women marginalized by virtue of their sexual orientation, disability, occupation, or location in a site of long-term civil war and conflict. We felt that the experiences of these women and their movements would enrich and sharpen both the conceptual framework and analysis of insights.

We therefore commissioned four new case studies in 2009-2010 of the movements of sex workers in Southwestern India, of lesbian women living in conditions of poverty in the Philippines, of the global disabled women's movement-in-the-making, and of the women's peace movement in war-torn Sudan.

These additional movements have certainly contributed to expanding both our conceptual understanding, as well as the lessons we can learn from their organizing and movement building strategies. Some of the lessons affirm what we already knew about the character of women's movements, and especially of feminist movements—the strong emphasis on mobilizing and building the political consciousness of the women most affected, for instance, or the gendered and radical political analysis that informs this consciousness. They also provide concrete evidence for things we believed to be true—such as the very democratic and accountable decision-making structures our movements attempt to create—but had little systematic data to assert. Finally, they also give us glimpses into such things as how mainstream women's movements have themselves been exclusionary or condescending to the movements and interests of constituencies like sex workers or disabled women; or the complex way in which intersecting issues of ability, race, caste, sexual orientation, occupation, and location are integrated into their movement building or organizing strategies: and the enormous diversity and innovativeness of the strategies used to build their collective power and impact.

Finally, we can only reiterate what we said in the introduction to the first edition of *Changing Their World*: We hope this document will *continue* to be a useful guide to your work, your organization, and the movements in which you are involved. We encourage you to read the new case studies in full, which are available at [www.awid.org/Library/Changing-their-World-2nd-Edition](http://www.awid.org/Library/Changing-their-World-2nd-Edition) and to send us your comments, suggestions, and feedback. We are confident that through this second edition, *Changing Their World* will continue to strengthen both our concepts and practices, and thus contribute to building the **power of movements**.

Given the number of movements that are repeatedly mentioned throughout this publication, and for the sake of narrative ease, they referred to by the case study name or acronym. The following table provides the name of the case studies and movements along with the acronyms.

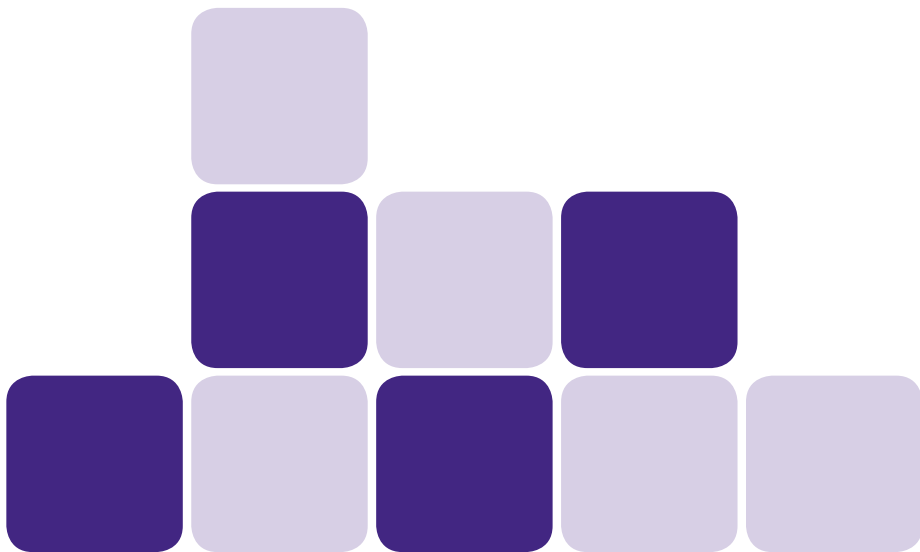


## Case Studies and Movements by Region

Initials	Movement	Region / Country	Initials	Movement	Region / Country
<b>CM</b>	Czech Mothers	Czech Republic	<b>IW</b>	Indigenous Women	Mexico
<b>DW</b>	Domestic Workers	USA	<b>P</b>	Piqueteras	Argentina
<b>DMS</b>	Dalit Mahila Samiti	India	<b>OINC</b>	One in Nine Campaign	South Africa
<b>GK</b>	GROOTS Kenya	Kenya	<b>RW</b>	Roma Women	East Europe
<b>PW</b>	Palestinian Women's Movements	Palestine / Middle East	<b>IW</b>	Iranian Women's Movement	Iran / Middle East
<b>DW</b>	Disabled Women	Global	<b>SuWEP</b>	Sudanese Women's Peace Movement	Sudan / Northeast Africa
<b>VAMP / SANGRAM</b>	Sex Workers Movements	Southwest India	<b>GALANG</b>	Lesbian Women	Philippines

# CHAPTER 1

THE POWER OF MOVEMENTS  
CLARIFYING OUR CONCEPTS







## Chapter 1: The Power of Movements: Clarifying our Concepts

“If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.”

Lao-Tzu

This saying of the great Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu seems particularly apt for those of us concerned with the state of feminist movements worldwide at the present time. Some of us feel that our movements have lost much of the momentum, coherence, and impact that they had up to the nineties, while others believe that in many contexts and constituencies, women are building their collective power in vibrant new ways. Where movement building has weakened, we see a far greater focus on implementing short-term projects and providing services. While these are certainly useful, they are often palliative, without a clear political agenda aimed at transforming gender and other social power relations in the longer term. So although many women’s rights activists and advocates speak of a “global women’s movement,” what constitutes this, where is it, and what is the collective agenda, is unclear. A range of factors, both external and internal, have contributed to the loss of focus on movement building, and these vary in intensity and importance in different regions and political contexts.

Externally, the dynamics are complex. Many donors have both moved away from support for movement-building strategies, towards gender mainstreaming, gender components in larger development projects, and the “investing in women and girls” approach<sup>1</sup>, which tends to instrumentalize women as the new saviors of their communities and economies. Other donors appear to have genuinely listened to the women’s movement’s analysis of funding trends for gender equality<sup>2</sup> and have deployed major resources for advancing women’s rights, such as the Dutch government’s MDG3 and FLOW Funds. Governments have on the one hand co-opted and de-politicized strategies developed by feminist groups to transform gender power—take for example, the case of micro-credit or political participation—while on the other a significant number of states have adopted progressive legislative reforms and policies that have increased women’s employment, health, and education status. And on the civil society side, social movements that were once quite gender-sensitive, or at least felt pressured to focus on women’s concerns and leadership within their movements (e.g. the environment, human rights, or economic justice movements), now often regard gender equality as “done”, or instrumentalize women’s concerns without genuinely gendering their perspective, agenda, or strategies.

Internally, within women’s movements and organizations, the struggle for organizational or personal survival, for retaining autonomy while also having to compromise with changing funding policies, and the backlash, in many locations, against feminist agendas, have all taken a toll. Conflicts and schisms within and between groups has led to fragmentation and increasing competition for limited resources, without necessarily widening the impact of feminist organizing. There is a widespread sense that we are in an era of building our own organizations rather than movements, of implementing projects rather than processes of more fundamental change in gender and social power relations, and in professionalized research and advocacy, rather than building the base that *demand*s the sort of policies such advocacy might yield. Most of all, there is a trend where many of the hard-won gains of women’s movements—equality under law, sexual and reproductive rights, equal pay for equal work, redress for abuse and violence—are being pushed back or eroded. Without strong, organized resistance to such trends, there is a real possibility of losing much of what we have struggled for over the past decades.

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1. See, for instance, the OECD’s “Investing in Women and Girls—The Breakthrough Strategy for Achieving All the MDGs” ([www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org))

2. Such as AWID’s own “Where is the Money for Women’s Rights Research”, available at [www.awid.org/Our-Initiatives/Where-is-the-Money-for-Women-s-Rights](http://www.awid.org/Our-Initiatives/Where-is-the-Money-for-Women-s-Rights)

Can we build movements that can face these challenges in increasingly complex economic and political contexts given the growing confusion about what constitutes a movement? Today the word movement is used quite loosely and sweepingly, without much clarity. All kinds of aggregations of women's organizations, all varieties of campaigns and activities related to women's issues are now described as movements: e.g., groups of organizations working in a particular region (the African Women's Movement) or country (the Indian women's movement), or sector / issue (the women's health movement, the reproductive rights movement, the gay and lesbian movement), are described as "movements" whether or not they bear the characteristics of a movement.

There is a vast body of literature on social movements, organizational development, and related subjects that could provide clarity—but most of this material has not been developed within a feminist perspective, and so does not really illuminate the concept and practice of building feminist movements. Even today, some of the 1980s writing on engendering the analysis of development and social change processes<sup>3</sup>, and 1980s and 1990s writing on women's empowerment processes<sup>4</sup>, are still the closest approximations or guides to a movement building praxis for feminists.

At AWID, we believe that these conditions make the time ripe for re-examining and clarifying our understanding of movements, movement-building, and most important of all, feminist movements. Our strategic initiative Building Feminist Movements and Organizations (BFEMO) was in fact launched to advance such clarity. It is also why the 11th AWID International Forum, held in 2008 in Cape Town, South Africa, was focused on the theme The Power of Movements, and the first edition of this publication, *Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements*, based on ten case studies of women's movements around the world, was launched at the 2008 AWID Forum. Given the huge demand for and very constructive feedback that we received on the first edition, we added four more case studies of movements of particularly marginalized women (disabled women, lesbian women, sex workers, and women in a conflict zone) and revised both the introductory and concluding chapters to create this second edition of *Changing Their World*.

But we do not offer this volume as an academic exercise or as a contribution to the scholarly literature on social movements. Its purpose is to help women activists and organizations committed to a feminist vision of social transformation to re-cast our strategies and catalyze a new wave of movement building that can bring feminist agendas back to global and local politics with renewed clarity, energy, and impact. We seek to revive a focus on building strong women's movements, but with strategies informed by the knowledge and experience gained over the past several decades, and in light of the new challenges we face. In order to do this, we need to re-examine and clarify some basic questions about movements and why they matter.

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3. Such as Maxine Molyneux's and Kate Young's work on women's practical needs and strategic interests and on women's condition and position in societies.

4. Such as DAWN's, Naila Kabbeer's, Srilatha Batliwala's and Diane Elson's conceptualizations.

## The Basic Questions

It seems obvious that we cannot locate new strategies to strengthen our movement-building work until we find answers to some basic questions:

- **What is a movement?**
- **What is a feminist movement?**
- **Why do movements matter?**
- **What are the challenges of women's/feminist movements?**
- **What is the relationship of organizations and individuals to movements?**
- **What are the elements of a movement-building approach?**

We know that there cannot be a single and final authoritative answer to any of these questions. But this edition is an attempt to at least begin to answer them by laying out some tentative concepts, definitions, and characteristics of movements, and an initial analysis of some of the current challenges that must be confronted and overcome in order to move forward. We hope this will help us achieve greater clarity about building movements, and particularly feminist movements and movement building, and the relationship between organizations, individuals, and movements. AWID would like to stimulate debate and discussion, contextualization of the concepts and analysis, and thus, both refinement and greater precision in our collective understanding and strategies. Finally, we try to provide some basic tools to help us examine our own work—no matter where we are located geographically, thematically, or strategically—so that together, we can begin a new journey of reclaiming feminism, revisiting our current strategies, and revitalizing our movements. We also aim to revive a sense of hope, of the power of resistance and rebellion—as the recent popular uprisings in the Middle East have so magnificently demonstrated—in sum, to reinstate the idea that movements can and will make other worlds possible, especially for women.

## What is a Movement?

While there are many scholarly definitions of social movements, sifting through these shows that movements can be simply defined as **an organized set of constituents pursuing a common political agenda of change through collective action**. Thus, movements are distinguished by these characteristics:

1. **A constituency base or membership that is mobilized and collectivized;**
2. **Members collectivized in either formal or informal organizations;**
3. Some **continuity over time** i.e., a spontaneous uprising or campaign may not be a movement in itself, though it may lead to one;
4. **A clear political agenda** i.e., the constituency has a shared analysis of the social / structural conditions that have disempowered them, and the changes they seek to make in these structures;
5. **Collective actions and activities** in pursuit of the movement's political goals;
6. **Use a variety of actions and strategies** from confrontational, militant actions (including violent protests), or peaceful protest / non-cooperation (a la Gandhi), public opinion building or advocacy strategies; and

7. **Clear internal or external targets** they will engage in the change process, such as:
- Their own membership or communities (such as in movements against discriminatory customs and social practices like FGM, violence against women, machismo, etc.);
  - Society at large (to change negative attitudes, biases or perceptions of themselves—e.g. racial, gender-based, caste-based, ethnic or religious discrimination, or exclusion by virtue of sexual orientation, ability, or occupation);
  - Other social groups who violate their rights or exclude them (such as discrimination and violence by majority groups against racial, religious, ethnic or sexual minorities, or claiming land rights, or fair wages from landowners or employers);
  - The state or regimes in power (in demanding, for instance, greater democracy, transparency, accountability, legal reforms, or policy changes);
  - Extra-state actors (such as drug cartels or criminal networks who terrorize and use direct and indirect violence against women as a means of control);
  - Warring factions in civil or military conflicts, who disrupt the conditions for daily survival and use violence against women as a weapon of war;
  - Private sector actors (corporations and employers who violate women's labor rights, cause environmental damage or restrict women's access to natural resources, etc.);
  - International institutions (such as the World Bank, UN, IMF, or WTO) whose policies and prescriptions have impacted women's lives directly and indirectly; and
  - A combination of some or all of the above.

While these characteristics are essential to qualify as a movement, their constituents may be organized with different levels of closeness, from very loose to very tight. Thus, movements have different degrees of cohesion and often live embedded within one another or connected to each other in different ways. This is familiar to those of us who identify as belonging to something as large, loose, and generic as a global or national women's movement, with a very broad political agenda of gender equality. But this broad movement is in turn populated by a variety of other movements (as well as organizations and individuals) with tighter ties, sharper agendas and more specific constituencies, e.g., a women's reproductive rights movement, a lesbian or disabled women's movement, an indigenous women's movement, the Iranian women's movement, and the African women's movement. Thus, the women's movement has within it movements of women organized around a particular set of issues, identities, nationality, or region. And indeed, many of the movements within The Movement may not identify as feminist, even if their primary constituency is women and they are engaged in a struggle for women's rights.

So what, then, is a *feminist* movement? In order to answer this question, we may have to first re-formulate what feminism itself means in the world today, in the light of recent history and present reality.



## What is Feminism Today?

The past three decades of activism, advocacy, research, and theorization, as well as the changing global geo-political context, have generated powerful insights and experience about our gains, setbacks, and the challenges of the future. These have also enabled us to re-frame our philosophy and approach, and create a broader vision for ourselves and the world we want to create. Through this process, feminism has evolved as an **ideology, an analytical framework, and a strategic framework**.

- **As an ideology**, feminism today stands not only for gender equality, but for the transformation of all social relations of power that oppress, exploit, or marginalize any set of people, on the basis of their gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, race, religion, nationality, location, class, caste, or ethnicity. We do not seek simplistic parity between the sexes that would give us the damaging privileges and power that men have enjoyed, and end up losing many of the so-called “feminine” strengths and capacities that women have been socialized to embody. Thus, we seek a transformation that would create gender equality within an entirely new social order, one in which both men and women can individually and collectively live as human beings in societies that are in harmony with the natural world, based on social and economic equality and the full body of human rights, and liberated from violence, conflict, and militarization.
- **As an analytical framework**, feminism developed / transformed the concepts of **patriarchy** (the social order of male rights and privilege) and **gender** (the socially-constructed relations of power between men and women). It has created a range of analytical tools and methods for unpacking the hidden and normalized power imbalances between men and women in various social institutions and structures (e.g. gendered division of labor in the household and in production, control of women’s sexuality and reproductive life). Feminist scholars have also developed radically new frameworks for analyzing the way in which multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion operate together, rather than incrementally, in people’s lives (e.g., concepts like intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1241-1299) and social exclusion). Feminism is also embracing new notions of gender and gender identities that go beyond the social construction of just two genders, thanks to the work of queer scholars and activists, and LGBT studies (Butler).
- **As a social change strategy**, feminism prioritizes the empowerment of women, the transformation of gender power relations, and the advancement of gender equality within all change interventions. Feminism believes that change that does not advance the status and rights of women is not real change at all. For instance, economic interventions that increase household incomes without giving women greater share of that income or altering the gender division of labor in the production of that income, or improvements in health care that do not address the specific barriers that may prevent women from accessing such care, are **not** feminist strategies. Thus, feminism views all change interventions through a “gender lens”—namely, examining how the change is impacting women. So whether the change strategy is focused on an *issue* (health, education, the environment, human rights, economic rights, etc.) or a *location* (a set of villages, a province, a country, a region), or *population* (indigenous people, workers, urban poor, etc.), feminism will examine whether gender equality and women’s rights are being consciously addressed and advanced by the change process.



 What is a Feminist Movement?

Feminist movements are social movements and have the same characteristics of movements discussed earlier. But they have certain features—certain *feminist* characteristics—which many or most other social movements lack:

- Their agenda is built from **a gendered analysis** of the problem or situation they are confronting or seeking to change;
- **Women form a critical mass** of the movement's membership or constituency, women are the subjects, not objects or targets, of the movement;
- They espouse **feminist values and ideology**. Gender equality, social and economic equality, the full body of human rights, tolerance, inclusion, peace, non-violence, respectful spaces and roles for all, etc., even if they don't call themselves feminist or articulate these values in more culturally specific ways;
- They have systematically built and centered **women's leadership** in the movement. This is in contrast to movements that treat women's participation instrumentally—in the sense of adding the strength of numbers at rallies and marches, or to promote a more inclusive, gender-sensitive image of their movement but not giving women any real decision-making power or meaningful leadership roles.
- The movement's **political goals are gendered**. They seek not only a change in the problem, but a change that privileges women's interests and seeks to transform *both* gender and social power relations;
- They use **gendered strategies and methods**. Strategies that build on women's own mobilizing and negotiating capacities, and involve women at every stage of the process; and
- They create more **feminist organizations** i.e., organizations that create more transparent systems and structures, consciously address the distribution of power and responsibility across roles, build a feminist practice of leadership (e.g. Batlwala, 2011), strong internal and external accountability and learning systems, and actively experiment with change within their own structures.

This is not to claim that all existing feminist movements—or ones that would claim to be feminist—necessarily manifest all these qualities. Rather, it is an attempt to frame an ideal prototype or set of principles that feminist movements should aspire to practice. This is a critical point since many mainstream movements, with very radical agendas, often reproduce the very politics and power hierarchies that they seek to challenge and change elsewhere—the structures of privilege, agenda-setting and decision-making power and exclusion. Unfortunately, many feminist organizations and movements are guilty of the same—so it is all the more important for us to create a framework that enables us to consciously tackle these negative dynamics within our own processes and structures.

It is also useful to make a distinction here between **building feminist movements** and **feminist movement building**.

**Building feminist movements** is to mobilize women (and their allies or supporters) in struggles whose goals are specific to gender equality outcomes. For instance, building movements for eradicating practices like female genital mutilation, bride-burning and female foeticide, or violence against women, or for expanding equality of access to citizenship (e.g. franchise), land or inheritance rights, education, employment, health, or reproductive and sexual rights. In this sense, the struggles to change customary inheritance rights in Kenya and Tanzania, the anti-FGM movements in several countries of Africa, movements against the repeal of gender-equal legal rights in several parts of the Middle East, the sex

workers movements in several parts of Asia-Pacific, Europe, North and South America, the Afro-Brazilian women's movement in Brazil, the reproductive rights movements across Latin America, the anti-dowry and anti-sex determination movements of India, the struggles against honor-killings in Pakistan, or for the rights of migrant women in China, are all examples of the *building of feminist movements*.

**Feminist movement building**, on the other hand, could be defined as the attempt to bring feminist analysis and gender-equality perspectives into other movements. Classic examples are the efforts of many feminists to engender the analyses, goals, and strategies of the environment, peace, human rights, and peasant and labor movements around the world. The involvement of multiple feminist groups in the struggles for democracy sweeping the Middle East and North Africa, or Code Pink, created to engender the peace movement that arose in the US against the invasion of Iraq and the war in Afghanistan, are good examples of feminist movement building. The Green Belt Movement (GBM) in Kenya, led by Nobel laureate Wanghari Mathai, is an environment movement with a strongly gendered analysis but mobilizes poor women and men in a larger struggle for protecting and preserving the natural resource base of their homelands. Shack Dwellers International and its national chapters struggle for the rights of tenure and safe habitat of slum dwellers, but with a strong feminist analysis and women's leadership. Feminist Sandinistas played a strong role in attempting to bring gender equality issues to the center of that political struggle in Nicaragua. Indigenous women across regions work for recognition of their rights and concerns as part of broader indigenous people's struggles. South African feminists have played a similar role in the anti-apartheid movement and now in the movements around HIV and AIDS. These are all examples of feminist movement building—of how feminists change and influence the building of movements with other agendas, to ensure that gender-equality outcomes are not marginalized or forgotten.

## Why do Movements Matter?

It is possible to argue that women can be empowered without necessarily building movements, through grassroots work and policy advocacy. Some would assert that macro changes—such as the CEDAW convention or the reproductive and sexual rights guaranteed in the Cairo Plan of Action—were achieved through the research, documentation, activism, and advocacy efforts of individuals and organizations, without the sort of movement characteristics that were detailed earlier. While this is true, if we consider the major changes in favor of women and gender equality that have occurred over the past several decades, it becomes evident that none of these could have been achieved without building some kind of **collective power**—women speaking not just as individuals, or through particular organizations, but with a powerful, collective voice. Thus, various UN policies and norm structures—such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform of Action, or the recognition of women's rights as human rights, or policy changes at the national level recognizing women's right to equal education, health care, employment, and access to credit, were all the result of organized lobbying by women's organizations, feminist activists, and advocates, through their collective action, without the affected constituencies always being involved in acting for these changes.

Building their collective power through movements helps women convert their quest for their human rights, for equality and justice into **a political force for change** that cannot be ignored by their families, communities, governments, or society at large. While resistance or rebellion by individual women is easy to squash or isolate, resistance by large numbers, acting together on a common agenda of change, is not easily suppressed. Such larger-scale struggles can also protect women from the backlash that usually follows, or at least ensure that any form of violence against them does not occur with impunity or in silence.

Movements are often **the most effective way for particularly stigmatized, marginalized and socially excluded constituencies of women to become visible** and have their voices heard. The case studies in this volume of the struggles of sex workers and disabled women, for instance, show that they would not have been able to challenge popular opinion, public policy, or even the perception

of women's movements about these groups, if they had not mobilized their own collective power in the form of the strong organizations and movements. Indeed, the case studies of groups like the domestic workers, indigenous women, Roma women, and Dalit women, show that they could not have become a force for change by restricting themselves to lobbying and advocacy.

Movements are also the best **training ground for women in political participation, and in the practice of democracy, leadership, and citizenship**. Building movements compels women to engage in a wide range of activities such as mobilizing and organizing themselves, creating participation, leadership, and decision-making systems that are inclusive and democratic, confronting and overcoming their own internalized tendency to reproduce patriarchal patterns of hierarchy and authoritarianism, testing and developing political strategies and tactics, engaging the social and political environment at various levels, forming strategic alliances, and dealing with backlash, repression, or cooption. All these are invaluable lessons in political life and claiming full citizenship, and build vital political skills. Being recipients of hand-outs or services, or participants in projects designed by others, cannot create this kind of experience or education.

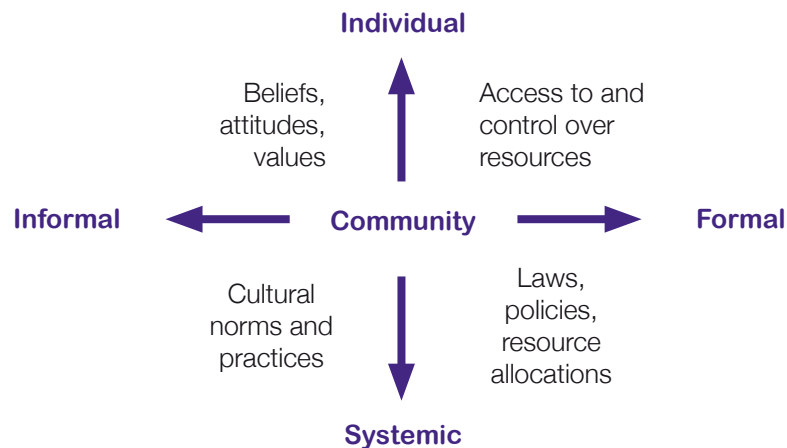
But perhaps the most important and compelling reason why movements matter is that **movements can create sustained change at levels that policy and legislation alone cannot achieve**. This point is eloquently articulated by a veteran African women's rights worker:

*We are now in a world in which so called advocacy, (read that as lobbying and taking members of parliament to a nice workshop!), is the strategy of choice. Getting more women at the decision making table is the other. Who set the table and what these women will do when they get there is another matter. Unless these women and these lobbying activities are backed up by the power of numbers, by the power of women who speak for themselves and have strong movements, then change is never going to be sustainable, and in some cases, it won't even come! Worst case, it will be rejected by the very women it might claim to benefit, e.g. policy change, or new legislation. We have seen this happen in several Southern African countries. Gender equality experts now come a dime a dozen. We are getting better and better at very sharp, well researched and well written policy analysis and our organisations are getting more and more specialized. We produce fabulous publications, our websites are the envy of many. None of this however can take the place of real-world, "under the tree" organizing. That hard, slow, painstaking work of talking with and as women, together. The vital work of building strong organisations and movements" (Win).*

But this is not just an individual's viewpoint—extensive empirical research over the past two decades has highlighted why change from above (i.e., policies, laws.), while important, cannot make gender equality a lasting reality on the ground. This is because they cannot penetrate some of the key institutional locations in which women's subordination is constructed or practiced—for example, the patriarchal cultural beliefs and practices embedded in the family and household, the clan or ethnic group, the school, the health center or hospital, the bank, the factory, and religious institutions. Several feminist strategic frameworks have actually been developed on the basis of this realization. One of the earliest ones postulated that lasting change in gender relations cannot be achieved by addressing women's *practical needs* alone (health care, water, income, child care), without addressing their strategic interests (dismantling patriarchal norms and practices, ending all forms of violence against women, giving women access and control over resources, changing the gender division of labor) (Molyneux, 227-254). Laws and policies can at best meet some practical needs, or create enabling conditions for women to pursue their strategic interests—but they cannot change the social conditions that make it hard for women to do so. Another way of understanding this vital role of movements is that they are able to achieve lasting changes in the social relations of power—including gender power. All the case studies in this volume demonstrate this point. In short, movements are essential to the transformation of gender power relations in a sustainable way. Let us see why.

**Figure 1** places the different dimensions of change needed for sustained and lasting change in women's *practical needs and strategic interests* in a diagram (Rao and Kelleher, 57-69). In this illustration, the various domains of change emerge through two intersecting continuums or axes. The y-axis runs from the individual to community level, and further down to the level of larger systems, and the x-axis cuts across, representing a continuum from the informal to formal social, cultural, economic, and political arrangements. These two axes thus create four quadrants or domains of change that must be tackled for sustainable transformations in gender and social power.

Figure 1: The Dynamic of Change



On the right, we see the *formal* mechanisms that influence individual and collective status: individual resource ownership (e.g., land, house, a job, educational level, access to health care, etc.); and the laws, policies, and resource allocations at the systemic level that determine the affluence, poverty, or status of different groups (e.g. equality guarantees in law and constitutions, affirmative action policies, or special budgets for women's social or economic development programs; or laws criminalizing same-sex relationships or sex work). These are the domains that can be challenged and transformed through research, advocacy, campaigns, and other interventions, without necessarily building movements of marginalized or discriminated groups. The campaigns for inclusion of women's unpaid subsistence work in national accounting systems, advocacy for gender budgeting or quotas for women in education, employment, training, and political bodies, and advocacy for changing discriminatory laws, are all examples of interventions that have brought about changes at the *formal* individual, community, or systemic levels.

On the left of the diagram are the *informal* cultural and social norms that are internalized by individuals and operate within communities, and which usually determine women's access to the opportunities, rights, and entitlements provided through changes in the *formal* domains. These informal dimensions include the traditions, beliefs, values, attitudes, norms, and practices that are deeply embedded in culture, and which operate at systemic, community, and individual levels. Culture is far slower to change than formal policy or law, and law and policy do not automatically create changes in culture. Thus, the culture of discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion of women is the most challenging domain where formal changes often do not penetrate.

We know that in reality, these domains are not as clearly demarcated or separate as the diagram suggests—their boundaries, if any, are porous and fluid, and it is difficult to map which quadrant is affecting or influencing the other. So a change in the informal domain of culture or belief—such as acceptance of girls going to school—could actually trigger a change in terms of formal policy, such as mandatory



## CLARIFYING OUR CONCEPTS

universal primary education regardless of gender. Similarly, the right to gender equality guaranteed in most constitutions of the world has enabled or triggered a number of changes in the values, attitudes and practices around women’s status and rights at the household or community level. The diagram is intended only to advance our conceptual clarity, and should not be read too literally or rigidly.

**Figure 2** makes the point in a different way: it illustrates the many hurdles women must cross in order to access their rights, most of which lie in the informal domain of cultural norms and socialization.

Figure 2: Barriers to Women’s Access to their Rights / Entitlements



Let us take the example of rape. While the laws of the land may have been reformed to give women greater rights, there are many cultural barriers they must cross to access redress or justice. Firstly, the victim’s own belief systems must be transformed to recognize that this is a crime of violence, and not something to be hidden for fear of being shamed or shunned by her family or community. Then, her family must support, rather than hinder her, in filing a complaint with the police and making the matter more public. The attitudes of the police must be changed to avoid further harassment or shaming of the victim, or to prevent their aligning themselves with the rapist, if he is from a more powerful group, and refusing to take up the case. She and her family need the support of the larger community, whose traditional taboos against making such matters public need to be altered. Then, she must have the resources—in terms of time, money—to seek legal assistance. And finally, legal services or courts must not only be available, but provide appropriate services to the victim—such as closed hearings and sensitive judges. And these barriers become even more complex if the rape victim happens to be lesbian or a sex worker. This clearly shows that the existence of formal laws and rights is no guarantee that women can actually reach them to obtain justice. We can cite similar examples from many other areas—lesbian women seeking partnership rights, sex workers fighting for health care, married women seeking contraception, or girl children wanting the same educational opportunities as their brothers.

And this is where the special power of movements, and especially grassroots movements, comes in. While individual feminists (such as lawyers, doctors, feminist researchers) and women’s organizations have successfully campaigned for equality under law, for millions of women, especially in the South, formal law is too remote, expensive and difficult to access. Their rights are determined not by formal courts but by customary laws and practices, administered by traditional clan, caste, or community mechanisms, where gender equality is considered contrary to custom and culture, and where patriarchal and other hierarchical belief systems are deeply embedded. And in a growing number of contexts today, criminal mafias and fundamentalist groups have far greater power over the women in their regions, rather than the state or its formal institutions. These informal and extra-state regimes terrorize women, their families and entire communities, attack women’s human rights defenders, and obstruct any kind of access to formal mechanisms of complaint or redress (WHRD IC). As a result of all these factors, feminist advocacy

may help create pro-women policies, laws, and resource allocations, but unless women themselves, and their families and communities, are able to break the hold of tradition and taboo, and unless the state is able to control the power of criminal networks and fundamentalist organizations, these positive gains have little meaning. Constituency-based movements, using consciousness-raising, political awareness and other strategies that challenge the power and practice of patriarchy, are far better able to tackle and bring down the barriers to women's equality in the sites where they are most deeply embedded.

The final reason why movements matter is that they can usually **impact on a scale** that single organizations, no matter how radical, effective, and successful, are able to do. We have all seen evidence of how dedicated organizations working with a feminist agenda, have tackled forms of oppression and exploitation and created significant shifts in cultural attitudes and practices at the local level. But for these transformations to occur on a larger scale, building feminist movements becomes critical.

## Where are Feminist Movements Today?

Several factors have weakened and fragmented feminist movements, particularly over the past ten or fifteen years, and they act in complex and inter-linked ways. Some of the most damaging are:

- The **co-option and or distortion of feminist ideology, discourse, and agendas** by mainstream institutions and social forces—such as governments and multilateral institutions, fundamentalist projects, donors, business interests, and the media. The term “empowerment”, for instance, which was claimed by feminists to signify the challenging task of shifting gender and social power relations in favor of women, and especially poor women, has been taken over and virtually divested of meaning and political content. Not only is empowerment now conflated with uni-dimensional interventions like micro-credit, but has been claimed by management gurus in the human resources field as an individualized motivational tool. At another level, the media has played a mainly negative role, simultaneously demonizing feminists and appropriating their language to appear progressive and modern. Private interests have also co-opted and distorted feminist ideas of equality for questionable commercial ends: promoting images of empowered and “liberated” women to sell products or lifestyles that have nothing to do with feminism.
- **The resurgence of fundamentalisms of various kinds**—economic, religious, ethnic, and other—have posed possibly the greatest threat and setback to feminist agendas and activism. Economic fundamentalism has imposed an economic order on the world that has resulted in decreased sovereignty of nation states, intensified the tyranny of structural adjustment programs and market dominance that we have been ill prepared to confront. The resulting impacts on women and gender relations have been complex—the burgeoning demand for women's labor in some sectors (“feminizing” of the labor force), and pockets of acute and escalating poverty where poor women bear the burden of household survival with the least support or resources to do so. Religious and ethnic fundamentalisms worldwide have created similarly complex challenges. On the one hand, there is the rabid and overt attack on feminist agendas in all regions where they have had a visible impact on policies, laws and social norms—ensuring inheritance, equal pay, labor protection, reproductive, and sexual rights for women, or raising public awareness of gendered violence and discrimination. Here, the fundamentalist project has been to discredit feminists as man-haters, baby-killers, family-breakers and sexual deviants. On the other, there has been a cunning cooption and distortion of feminist projects—such as the demand for equality under law or a greater role in civil and political life—to spread fear and hatred, vilify and demonize other communities or instrumentalize women into becoming armed militants in ethnic conflicts. In still other groups, there is a straightforward attack on and attempts to rescind women's social and political gains of the past decades—especially women's reproductive and sexual rights—and the re-assertion of medieval forms of patriarchal gender relations. In most cases, feminists and women's groups have been ill equipped to face these serious, complex and multiple challenges. This has led to retreat, or

piecemeal responses, or a kind of underground activism that has further weakened and fragmented our movements.

- There has been a gradual but accelerating **flow of major donor resources away from movement-building approaches** towards projects and interventions that supposedly show more “visible” and “measurable” returns (Clark, Sprenger, and VeneKlasen). This de-funding is in turn a product of more serious and subterranean political trends in many developed countries: a backlash against feminist ideology, politics and power; a growing tide of political and social conservatism; pandering to the sexist and conservative elites in developing countries; and above all, a growing suspicion of approaches that do not somehow return benefit to the investing countries—e.g., opening up of markets for their exports, increasing purchasing power, creating better trained but low-cost labor for overseas production, lowering trade barriers and investment controls, and so forth. And of course, movement-building approaches are above all suspect because they are considered too political—and therefore threatening to the interests of the developed countries or their elite allies in the South.
- **The magic bullet syndrome** is a result of this larger politics, but is another factor that has had a very negative impact on building feminist movements. This has produced one of the great ironies of our times: even as there is an apparent increase in global commitment to poverty eradication and social justice—as witnessed by the great fanfare surrounding the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and their centrality to aid architecture—there is a growing delusion that there are magic bullets and quick fixes which can override the need for more fundamental but painful and longer-term transformative processes. The Investing in Women argument is a recent example of an approach that is easily over-simplified and instrumentalized when it is reduced to focusing resources on women as “smart economics,” because women are more conscientious borrowers, more industrious producers and workers, and more likely to use their income to raise the quality of life and education and health status of the family. Feminist activists have always understood that positive and lasting change in the status of women can only result from processes that tackle the basic structures of power and privilege and truly transform our societies in favour of women and all marginalized and excluded people. But today, our organizations are unlikely to be resourced for such work; but the money will come streaming in if we offer to implement some of the magic bullets that are currently popular shortcuts to women’s empowerment and gender equality, namely: gender mainstreaming, women-focused micro-finance projects, and quotas for women in politics. Many of these are rooted in feminist ideas and advocacy, but they have been divested of the complex transformative strategies within which they were originally embedded and reduced to formulas, rituals, and mantras.
- **The NGO-ization of feminist movements** is another critical factor that has weakened our movement building capacity and focus. The search for resources and sustainability led feminist activists and movement-builders to found organizations within the NGO paradigm. National legal and regulatory requirements impose certain kinds of structural norms on these, and donor requirements and priorities impose another set of norms. Such organizations, often born out of movements or to support movement-building work, are gradually pushed into running projects and services, some of which may actually contravene their politics, ideology, or even their own experience of what really works. Many feminist scholars believe that this has also gradually shifted power away from the constituency that movements organized and into the hands of organizations and organizational leadership that is increasingly less connected and accountable to the constituencies they claim to serve.
- The complexity and breadth of issues that feminists have tackled over the past three decades, the emergence of new issues, voices and interest groups, has also led to a level of **specialization and diversification** that is considered by some to have fragmented and splintered feminist movements. Today we have an overwhelming spectrum of distinct struggles and associations by women: Economic empowerment and labor rights groups, indigenous women, peasant and landless women’s groups, women’s health, reproductive and sexual rights movements, land and inheritance rights struggles,

housing and slum dwellers movements, lesbian and transsexual groups, struggles of women displaced by economic development projects or wars and conflicts, sex workers movements, anti-trafficking and violence against women campaigns, women's legal rights campaigns, not to mention struggles against specific forms of discrimination (such as FGM, dowry, caste), struggles of women of particular ethnicities and religious groupings (such as Muslim women, Roma women, Chiapas women) or occupations (fish workers, street vendors, small women farmers, *piqueteras*), women living with or caring for people affected by AIDs—this list could go on and on. Each of these has their own agendas, goals and strategies, presenting a bewildering array of priorities and movements that testify to the vibrancy, but also the segmentation, of women's movements. While there is nothing inherently problematic about this, it presents some challenges in terms of creating an overarching and shared political agenda to which all these components would subscribe—the problem of speaking on at least some set of issues with a unified voice. This fragmentation, without some mechanism for cohesion, also enables outside forces to divide and rule more easily.

- Possibly because of the above factors, **large numbers of women have become active supporters of and participants in other movements whose agendas are ultimately antithetical to their strategic gender interests**, such as religious and ethnic fundamentalist movements. Progressive women's organizations are struggling to analyze, much less challenge or push back, this process. One of the case studies in this volume, set in Palestine, takes a close look at precisely this phenomenon, but similar processes are visible in large parts of Africa, Latin America, North America, the Middle East and Asia. Why are these movements able to mobilize women on such a scale? Is it because most others reaching out to women are too narrowly focused on projects and services, on micro-credit, while other movements are recognizing and activating women's desire to be part of a larger social project? Unless feminist forces re-engage in movement building, and unless resources are made available to facilitate this, we may be facing an era when significant numbers of the world's women will be mobilized around agendas that roll back reproductive rights, restore veiling and seclusion, limit women's roles in public and political life, and the repeal of laws that advanced women's rights and gender equality as desirable social goals (Balchin, 36-40).
- Feminist movements have also lost some of their early clarity in terms of their **theory of change**. In the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, those who were mobilizing around the world to enhance women's role and representation in politics and political structures, were operating with a particular theory of change. They believed that the transformation of gender power structures and relations at the societal or macro level could be lastingly achieved only through political change (enabling policies, legislation, enforcement and protection of rights); and that this, in turn, would only become possible when a critical mass of women gained representation in local, national and global political bodies. They also assumed that this critical mass of women in political institutions would transform the very *nature of power* and the *practice of politics* through values of cooperation and collaboration, holding power in trusteeship (meaning power on behalf of, not over), greater transparency and public accountability. In other words, that women would *play politics* differently and *practice power* accountably.

Work on women's empowerment in the 1980s and 1990s was similarly based on a notion that the long-term transformation of gender relations would occur only when feminist movements were able to challenge and transform three domains: (a) the ideologies that justified gender discrimination; (b) the access to and distribution of both public and private resources that privileged men in every social strata; and (c) the institutions (family, market, state, community) and structures (economic, political, social, cultural—such as policies, religious practices, political barriers, and other exclusionary structures such as race, class, caste, religion, etc.) through which patriarchal and elitist norms of privilege and power were perpetuated. This analysis provided a kind of clarity—no matter how illusory—that informed and framed strategies of women's empowerment, and helped ensure that they did not focus on only one of these dimensions at the cost of the others.



Today, the tough lessons of experience have humbled us—we know that structures of power are incredibly resilient. We have seen that they find ways of both overtly accommodating us (such as signing the Beijing or Cairo Platforms of Action, creating national women's commissions, or even reforming biased laws), and covertly marginalizing or subverting our agendas in unforeseen ways (through the travesty, for instance, that gender mainstreaming has become, or by making micro-credit programs the proxy for women's empowerment). Globalization and its attendant impacts on women and their communities—social, cultural, economic and political—are something we have yet to fully absorb or understand, much less be capable to tackle. We have not yet synthesized or built upon these lessons to create a new theory of change—and indeed, there are precious few spaces to do this important “thought work” given the end of the global conference era and the de-funding of what are derogatively considered “talk shops”.

But today, it is difficult to find any clear theory or analysis of how to achieve a broader gendered social transformation informing feminist activism. The theory of change underlying many of our actions and strategies is often outdated and based on assumptions that are no longer valid in the complex economic and political reality of today, they are too narrow or limited, or too short-term and pragmatic, forgetting the longer-term social transformations that would lead to sustainable shifts in gender and social power relations. This is all the more critical since the forces of globalization, fundamentalism, violence and conflict, and the intensifying backlash against feminist agendas require responses that arise from a comprehensive, powerful analysis of how these forces are acting on both gender and social power. We therefore need to re-articulate a theory of change for our times—one that could become the basis for building the common agenda that is either missing or too weak in our current politics and vision.

## Movements and Organizations—A Relational View

The relationship between movements and organizations is a complex and sometimes confusing one. As stated earlier, organizations sometimes claim to be movements. Organizations are not, in and of themselves, movements—but they do play critical roles in building movements and as organizing structures within them. So while movements certainly contain or relate to multiple types of organizations, they are something much larger. To begin unraveling this intricate relationship, it is helpful to understand the difference between movements and organizations, and to deconstruct the relationship between them. Let us begin by defining and understanding organizations.

### What is an Organization?

At its simplest, an organization can be defined as **a group of people joining together intentionally and creating a structure to accomplish a common set of goals**. In business management language, organization is defined as

*“A social unit of people, systematically structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals on a continuing basis. All organizations have a ... structure that determines relationships between functions and positions, and .... delegates roles, responsibilities, and authority to carry out defined tasks. Organizations are open systems in that they affect and are affected by the environment beyond their boundaries”* (business-dictionary.com).

**In the context of social movements**, organizations have most of the above characteristics, but in addition, must be seen as **sites from which movements are built, supported, serviced and governed—and sometimes, destroyed. They are the primary structures in or through which movement leaders, activists, and members are organized, trained, capacitated, protected, and energized to pursue the transformational agenda of movements.**

There are a number of myths about organizations that must be challenged and cleared away before we can fully understand why the organization-movement relationship can be so fraught and contentious at times. The first and most important of these is that organizations are rational structures, founded on logical, efficient principles and driven by their goals rather than by the personalities that inhabit them (Rao and Kelleher, 2002). In reality, organizations are in fact microcosms of the social and power relations contexts in which they are created, and consequently tend to reproduce the imbalances and inequalities of the societies in which they are built. So gender-biased and unequal societies tend to produce inequitable organizations, and inequitable organizations tend to reproduce inequalities internally and externally, though often in subtle and invisible ways. This helps us to understand why organizations—even feminist ones—are often sites of either overt or covert conflict, and why even organizations created to build movements, or formed as organizing structures within movements, sometimes damage, rather than support, the movements they ostensibly stand for.

## ■ A Typology of Organization-Movement Relationships

The organizations that populate or relate to movements are essentially of two kinds—**formal** and **non-formal**, and there are four types of organization-movement relationships:

1. **Movement-building / movement-supporting organizations;**
2. **Movement-created organizations;**
3. **Movement-allied organizations; and**
4. **Service-providing organizations.**

Let us first disaggregate the nature of formal and non-formal organizations, and then examine the nature of the relationship of the different categories of organizations to movements.

**Formal organizations** are either external to movements, or created by them, and have several distinct characteristics:

- They are legally constituted entities regulated by the laws and financial accountability systems of the various national contexts in which they are formed. In the social change context, these are the registered non-profit, non-governmental or “charitable” organizations that are familiar to most of us;
- They must abide by the non-profit legislation, regulations, or charity laws of a country—these norms often limit, for instance, their right to engage in activities that a particular country’s policies deem as political, anti-national, lobbying, or profit-making;
- They are authorized to raise funds for their activities from both private donations and public entities, though the use of these funds for the purpose for which they were raised is closely monitored, at least in theory; and
- Since non-profit organizations are considered to be serving the public interest in some way, they are usually tax-exempt but are required to audit their accounts and report their financial data on a regular basis to some government authority.

Formal organizations whose main purpose is to build and support movements may be categorized as **movement-building organizations**, or **movement-support organizations**. They exist apart from or outside the movements they build or support, though they work in close and sometimes integral partnerships with them. They were established before the movement itself came into being, and have usually played a critical role in the emergence of the movement, but were not created by it. In this volume, there are several examples of movement-building / support organizations SANGRAM in India, GROOTS Kenya, SuWEP in the Sudan, and GALANG in the Philippines, for instance, were all set up either with the specific purpose of building a movement around the particular constituencies and issues they targeted, or now exist primarily to serve and support the movements to which they are allied.

Formal organizations set up *by* movements as ways of organizing their members and pursuing the movement's agenda, are internal to movements and may be termed **movement-created organizations**. They are legally constituted entities governed by the sort of regulations and fiscal accountability that we outlined above, but they have usually come into being after the movement itself reaches some stage of development (see the concluding chapter, "Lessons to Learn" for more on the stages of movement evolution). Some formal organizations from the case studies in this volume that fall into this category include the National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women, the National Alliance of Domestic Workers, the Mothers Centers, the Disabled People International, and the One in Nine Campaign.

**Non-formal organizations** are an important organizing framework within social movements, and certainly in women's movements. They are not legally constituted entities, but this does not mean they are any less complex or multi-layered, or less effective in their functioning or importance as movement infrastructures. They often exist alongside formal organizational structures such as NGOs, cooperatives, or unions. Women's collectives, savings and credit groups, self-help groups, study groups, and neighborhood/ factory-floor committees are the most typical form of non-formal organizations at the grassroots level. Federations, networks, coalitions, and alliances are prevalent forms of non-formal organizations at provincial, national, and international levels. While non-formal organizations can mirror the same structural and governance systems that formal organizations use—e.g., election of leaders and office-bearers, regular meetings, annual assemblies, and so forth—there are two key differences:

1. They generally cannot mobilize resources from formal entities like donor agencies, government programs, or banks. However, they can and do generate resources through other means—by collecting fees from their members, or donations from well-wishers, and often maintain accounts as carefully as any registered body.
2. They are not governed or regulated by any formal legal requirements or rules, but can create their own norms and structures. For example, most non-profit or charitable organization laws require legally-constituted organizations to have governing boards and specific office-bearers (such as a President, Secretary, and Treasurer). Non-formal organizations are not thus constrained—they can choose to create their own kind of governing structures, including mechanisms like coordinating committees, or collective leadership.

Several of the women's collectives, village-level committees and neighborhood groups in this volume, such as that of the Iranian women, Piqueteras, sex workers, Dalit women, and disabled women, are examples of non-formal organizations. The Iranian women's movement is an excellent example of the power of non-formal organizations: despite the determination of the regime in that country to dismantle and destroy the women's movement, they have failed to do so because there are no formal structures to target, and women use highly informal, dispersed, and resilient local structures to sustain their struggle.

Whether formal or non-formal, organizations play a number of roles within and in relation to movements. **In the case of movement-building or supporting organizations**, some key roles played include:

- **Consciousness raising and awareness building:** as many of the case studies in this volume illustrate, movement-building organizations often begin by raising the consciousness of their target constituency of women and building their awareness of their rights.
- **Mobilizing and organizing the constituency:** This is usually the next step after awareness building, and helps affected individuals and groups to transform themselves into an organized constituency that frames its initial political agenda for change.
- **Capacity-building:** to further strengthen and consolidate the movement, support organizations will also usually engage in a range of capacity-building activities with movement leaders and members, including leadership development, need-based training, advocacy skills, adult education and literacy, and so forth.

- **Strategic Support:** This includes providing strategic advice, situational analysis, new ideas, policy watching and analysis to enable movements to seize policy dialogue opportunities, examining and interpreting larger political trends that may affect or concern the movement, providing convening spaces, etc.
- **Services:** Some movement building and support organizations also establish and provide needed services to their constituency. This role is often critical in women's movements, since women's practical needs for health services, credit, income generation, child care, or other services are unmet, and have to be addressed.
- **Advocacy:** Particularly in the early stages of movement formation, advocacy on behalf of the constituency is another role that movement-building organizations play, until such time as leadership from the constituency is able to take on this role.
- **Fund-raising and resource management:** Since many movement-created organizations (see below) are not formally registered and cannot directly mobilize resources from external agencies for their needs, movement-support organizations often act as fund-raisers, pass-through or re-granting bodies, and fund-managers for movements. GROOTS Kenya or Sangram in India are examples of movement-building organizations that play this role for the movements they exist to support.

**Movement-building and support organizations** are where many feminist and women's organizations would place themselves, and they stand in a far more complex and contested relationship to movements. Debates have arisen as to whether these organizations are truly building or serving movements, or have become entrenched in their own survival. Many feminist and women's organizations that were formed to support and strengthen movement-building in an earlier era, have diverted their energies to executing donor or government-driven projects and sub-contracts, simply in order to survive and sustain themselves. In many regions of the world, as regimes became friendlier to gender equality goals, both governments and donors played a role in converting groups that were once focused on movement building into becoming their technical assistance arms, or in-house "gender experts". This is at least partly the result of the co-option, specialization and hierarchization that we discussed earlier under the challenges facing feminist movements. These dynamics raise difficult questions about the rationale that guides these compromises, and whether the loss of focus on movement-building serves the final social and political purpose for which these organizations were originally established.

**Movement-created organizations** are those set up by movement constituents / members to structure and govern themselves more democratically and effectively, to gain greater visibility and voice, make coherent and strategic decisions, and/or coordinate their collective power and action. Unions or workers federations (such as that of self-employed women, home-based workers, street vendors, sex workers, etc.), ascriptive associations or organizations of particular identity groups (indigenous women, Dalit women, lesbian and transsexual groups, etc.), and associations of women and communities that transcend traditional sociological categories and are based on new identities emerging from their social or political experience, leading to shared agendas (piqueteras, slum and barrio women, migrant, displaced, and conflict-affected women) are all examples of movement-created organizations. While movement-created organizations play many of the roles listed for movement-building organizations, they have certain distinct and unique roles that are important to recognize:

- **Structuring collective power.** We have seen earlier that a key characteristic of movements is the way in which they build the collective power of individuals and groups affected by a particular set of issues or sharing specific types of discrimination, marginalization, or exclusion to act together, powerfully, around a shared agenda of change. This would be impossible without creating structures through which to express that collective power. Thus, movement-created organizations are first and foremost ways of organizing the movement's constituency into units and groupings that channel their collective power in effective and strategic ways. So rather than hundreds or thousands of women who identify with a particular agenda rushing around incoherently doing different things, movement-created organizations help them create coherent, cohesive, planned actions that can have greater effect.

- **Democratizing participation and accountability.** The organizations internal to movements—whether formal or not—are vital mechanisms of participation for their constituents. By creating an accessible space for all those who identify with the movement’s agenda to meet and participate in its analysis, actions and decision-making, these organizations are the movement’s mobilization tool, and consequently, an essential expressions of the movement’s legitimacy and right to represent its constituency. They are also an important accountability system, since through these organizations the movement’s leaders and representatives are often elected and empowered to pursue its agenda. The Mothers Centers (Czech Republic) and Domestic Workers (USA) case studies illustrate this point very clearly—the organizations of mothers and domestic workers cascade up from the local to the national, and ensure that the movement’s leadership remains both representative of and accountable to its members.
- **A governance mechanism.** For the same reasons, movement-created organizations create a governance mechanism for the movement. Through its organizational units, and its overarching organizational structure, movement members are able to elect or nominate leaders and representatives to govern the movement, represent it in external spaces, make political, strategic and operational decisions for the movement.
- **An advocacy or representation mechanism.** Movement-created organizations also play the role of representing and advocating on the movement’s behalf with state, multilateral, private sector, and other actors that the movement engages or challenges. In some cases, they may engage movement allies or the mainstream, male-led movements from which they have separated in order to pursue women’s specific agenda within the larger movement. The National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women is a good example of this, it is a movement-created organization that engages not only with the state but with the mainstream women’s movement in Mexico, as well as the male-dominated indigenous people’s movement of which it is also a part.

Since they arise from the movement’s constituency base, movement-created organizations stand at the center of movements, and have little problems with establishing their credibility or legitimate right to represent the interests of their members to the external world. They can, however become static, hierarchical, less democratic, or be dominated by authoritarian styles of leadership, and these trends have to be examined and corrected, regardless of the legitimacy they enjoy in the eyes of their own members or others.

An important group of movement-created organizations of an earlier era were autonomous feminist groups who maintained a sharp political and organizational distance from women’s NGOs and other feminist organizations. In the 1970s and 1980s, autonomous women’s groups prided themselves on their independence from government, donors and business interests—particularly from funding from any of these sources—and their voluntarism. Most members of autonomous groups supported themselves through jobs in the academy, the media, or independent consulting, and were thus able to contribute their time to feminist activism without financial survival concerns. However, the changes in political environment and institutionalization that occurred in the 1990s, significantly in Latin America and Asia, led many of these groups to mutate into NGOs. Many autonomous feminist groups have been the fiercest critics of the NGO-ization of the women’s movement, and challenge the right of the latter to be considered feminist or even within the movement at all. However, these same groups have often become isolated, without a demonstrable connection to a larger constituency or visible action agendas. Other feminist activists are often critical of autonomous groups for these very reasons, and question their right to speak for the movement.

Another category of organizations that stand in relationship to movements are **movement-allies**. These are formal and non-formal organizations such as political parties, academic groups, institutions or departments, autonomous feminist groups, international and national NGOs, supportive donor agencies, and even some international organizations like the UN or the Nobel Prize Committee. In this volume, for instance, we will see examples some of these types of allies in these case studies: Piqueteras (Argentina)



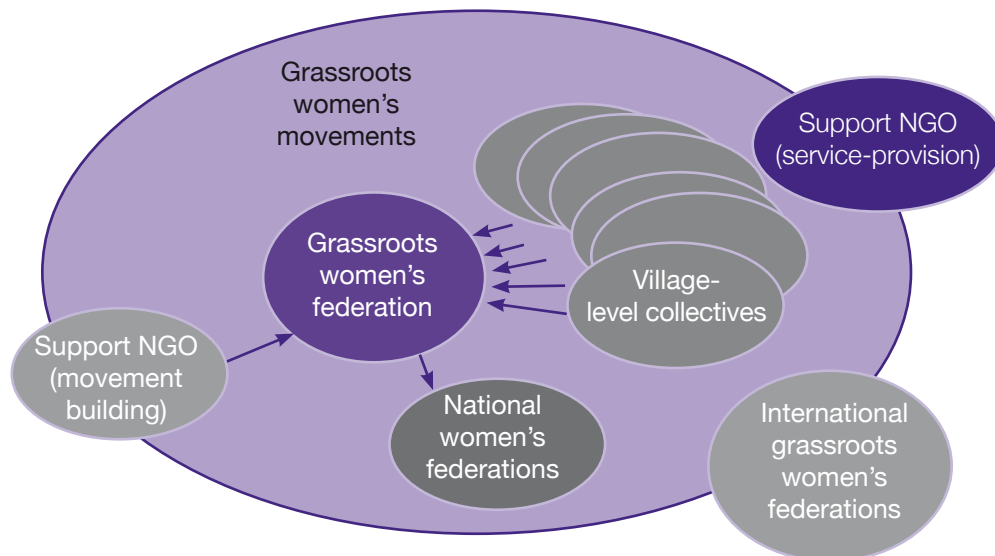
and Palestinian Women’s Movement (Palestine) with political parties; the Indigenous Women (Mexico) with UNIFEM, and women academics from the universities women’s studies departments; Sex Workers Movement (Southwest India), with health and human rights groups; Domestic Workers (USA) with legal and immigrant rights groups; Iranian Women’s Movement (Iran), with the Nobel Women’s Initiative; One in Nine Campaign (South Africa) with women academics from the university; and Czech Mothers (Czech Republic) with the UN, the city municipality, and some political parties.

Finally, there are organizations that exclusively provide services to women in health care, education or literacy, child care, rescue homes or shelters, or credit and legal aid. These **service organizations** may not be concerned with movement building per se, but often have a conscious relationship to movements, and play a critical role in meeting the practical and strategic needs of women of different constituencies. In fact, movements themselves may set up such service organizations to meet the needs of their constituents. We must acknowledge that sometimes, movements need these services in order to enable their constituents—especially women—to engage in organizing and action towards their agenda, or to protect their members and leaders from legal or political attacks. We need to put such organizations in a separate and valued category, which we might term **movement serving**. But in order to be considered among organizations that stand in direct relationship to movements, they have to go beyond mere service-provision and engage with the movement’s agenda in some concrete way. For instance, they would need to have internal monitoring and accountability mechanisms to check how their services and activities are contributing to the movement or its political agenda.

It is important to emphasize that **we should resist the tendency to put our organizations in a hierarchy** where only those claiming to be movement-building organizations are valued, valorized, or glamorized, and those providing critical services to women or their communities, or those helping women survive in politically or economically hostile environments—such as shelters and safe houses, child care, community kitchens, crisis loans, legal assistance—are put at the bottom of the pile.

To help us pull all these disparate but important organizational types, and organization-movement relationship into a coherent whole. **Figure 3** illustrates how all these fit together, using the hypothetical example of a grassroots women’s movement. The figure is based on a real-world example (GROOTS), and helps us understand all our organizations could work together within a movement, if we have a shared agenda.

Figure 3: Movements and Organizations: A Relational View





### Movements and Individuals

Our definition and analysis of movements, and our focus on the relationship between organizations and movements, should not result in diminishing the important and often critical role that individuals play. Feminist movements, in particular, have been strengthened and sometimes even propelled by the role of individual feminists, many of whom did not belong to feminist, women's or progressive organizations of any kind. In some parts of the world, in fact, individual feminists, working in mainstream professions and institutions, became critical intellectual and strategic leaders of feminist movement building. They were scholars and scientists in the academy, doctors and health care professionals in hospitals, health centers, or government health departments or ministries; they were demographers and population experts, economists, teachers and educators; they were journalists and media professionals, and lawyers and legal scholars; they were feminists in donor agencies, or in multilateral, bilateral, and international financial institutions. These were women deeply committed to the feminist agenda and to marginalized and excluded women and men.

This trend continues to be a reality, and these women can legitimately claim membership of movements. They are individuals who are not necessarily part of the affected group or constituency organizing for change—they need not ally themselves with movements, they have professional careers and job security. And yet they choose, for ideological reasons, to commit themselves to advancing women's rights and social transformation both within their own institutional settings as well as by supporting feminist and women's movements on the ground. Throughout the world, these individuals have played critical roles at some historic moments, and occasionally have ensured the survival of feminist movements and activists.

In Latin America, for instance, during the era of authoritarian regimes that clamped down on social movements and arrested their key leaders and activists, feminist women in the academy provided spaces to convene and sustain each other until better times; some even provided financial support and legal aid to activists under threat. In South Asia, individual feminists in various professional locations have provided vital support to grassroots struggles and movements of marginalized people (such as dam-displaced people, human rights defenders, LGBT groups or sex workers unions) in the form of shelter, legal aid, convening spaces, policy analysis, research for advocacy, etc. In many parts of the world, individuals have acted as whistle-blowers when movements and/or their leaders have been attacked or suppressed, providing critical exposure in the media, with international or national human rights commissions, and creating vital public awareness and debate locally and even internationally.

Individuals stand in a range of relationships to movements. Some people enter and exit on an *ad hoc* or need basis, some associate themselves with specific time-bound projects, programs, or research studies, and others form long-term relationships of solidarity and accompaniment. All these roles are important to strengthening movements, and greatly expand the intellectual resources and expertise they can access in their struggles. They also provide a set of alliances that, in certain circumstances, lend movements greater credibility, legitimacy and power.



## Movement Building: Some Key Elements of a Feminist Process

Strong and sustainable feminist movements will arise from processes that contain most of these elements—one can almost argue that it is these elements that make a process both feminist and a movement:

- **Consciousness raising and awareness-building:** Feminists more or less invented consciousness-raising, since early feminist analysis understood that women’s participation in, co-option by, or reproduction of their own oppression, exclusion, and subordination was a result of the false consciousness in which they existed. This false consciousness is created through the processes of both socialization (conditioning into particular values, beliefs, world-views and roles), as well as structural barriers and threats (intimidation or violence against women who strayed from their allotted position). Raising their consciousness of their oppression and exploitation thus became a critical first step in building feminist movements. A plethora of innovative and powerful consciousness-raising tools were created by feminist popular educators around the world—tools and methods that have sadly fallen into disuse in the current times, as the consciousness-raising process itself has often been abandoned in favor of other first steps such as forming savings and credit groups. Latin American feminist popular educators also gave their sisters the powerful idea of putting Paulo Freire’s liberation pedagogy to feminist use, thus enabling women’s consciousness raising processes to lead to a gendered analysis of the larger social, economic and political structures of oppression in which women lived.
- **Building a mass base:** This involves the mobilization of aware, conscious women into varied forms of collectives or groups, named and framed using culturally and locally appropriate and familiar forms<sup>5</sup>. These collectives formed the foundation of early feminist organizing and movement building, since it helped organize the movement’s constituency or mass base into visible and accessible units that could then link up and amplify their voice, vision, and struggle. This constituency base and its organizational and leadership structures were distinct and autonomous from the NGOs that might have mobilized them. In other words, it was they who were at the vanguard of the movement, not the NGO, although the NGO continued to provide strategic analysis and support, new ideas, and occasionally, protection from backlash. Building this foundation was painstaking business, but irreplaceable—it gave feminist movements their teeth, their legitimacy, and their power. The diversion of energy into other activities has cost us a great deal, including our political power.
- The question is **do numbers really count?** Lesbian or transsexual movements, or feminist disability groups, might argue that it is not numbers but tactics, and that their smaller numbers do not make them less of a movement. The answer probably lies somewhere between these poles: numbers do count, but not in some absolute quantitative sense. They matter because to qualify as a movement, we have to demonstrate an organized constituency base that has engaged in some collective action—so whether it’s a hundred or a hundred thousand, it is the level of organization, cohesion, a shared political agenda, and the exercise of collective power and action in pursuit of that agenda that matters. Fifty people or organizations, meeting at a conference or workshop on some issue of shared concern, do not constitute a movement, though a movement could easily be born in such a space.
- Feminist movements will have **clearly crafted political agendas** that are informed and framed by a theory of change that incorporates both gender and social transformation. These agendas will be generated through bottom-up processes that use the process of agenda-building itself as a consciousness raising tool. In other words, they would not have ideologues who create the agenda and vision, and followers who are converted to and mobilized around this. Feminist agendas will arise through debate and democratic discussion in which constituents have a large and even defining role.

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5. For example, the *sanghas* and *samoohs* of Indian women’s empowerment programs, or the *marais* of New Zealand, or the mothers centers of Germany and the Netherlands, or the market women’s groups of East and West Africa, or the *mehfils* of the Magreb.



- **A spiral of mobilization, organization, building a theory of change, common political agenda, action strategies, assessment and evaluation, critical reflection, and re-grouping:** These should characterize feminist movements. That is, they should be dynamic, learning movements, not static ones reproducing the same analysis and strategies over long periods of time, without spaces for critical reflection and re-grouping for greater impact. They will also attempt to expand their constituency base with each round of the spiral, in order to increase their collective power and political clout.
- Given the importance of learning and change, **building a new kind of knowledge, and a new politics of knowledge building**, would be a key feature of feminist movements: Feminist movements would challenge the monopoly of knowledge professionals (academics, researchers, development and gender “experts”), by democratizing the processes of learning and knowledge generation within and by their movements. They should create space, respect, and concrete mechanisms for their members to participate in theorizing, analyzing, and monitoring and evaluating their experiences. They make it possible for knowledge to be created in multiple forms that do not privilege the written word and patronize others forms of expression—oral traditions, street plays, art, or music. They may use the most modern technologies of documentation and communication, but will make these a part of the “knowledge democracy” rather than the “knowledge economy” by challenging concepts like patents and copyrights. They would also resist the exploitation and expropriation of their knowledge (of plants and seeds, or organic farming methods, for instance) by external forces such as multinational corporations.
- Most importantly, feminist movements would be concerned **not just with changes at the formal institutional level but at the informal level** or within the actual contexts and communities in which their constituents transact their lives and live their realities (i.e., not just changes in legislation or policy but in the culture of patriarchy, manifested in the attitudes and practices of families and communities). There will be a strong emphasis, therefore, on substantive rights and not just on formal structures that often do not reach women in their life contexts (a legal reform, for instance, without the organizing and consciousness raising at the community level that enables women to access and assert these rights).
- Feminist movements should **focus on transforming their own practice of power**, and build new models of power and leadership within their own structures and processes. This has been a distinct feature of many feminist movements worldwide—the attempts to break away from patriarchal models of power and create more shared models of leadership, authority and decision-making. While these have not always been successful—the insidious and hidden power structures that have emerged, for instance, in overtly “flat” feminist organizations like autonomous women’s groups, for instance—they are worthy examples of the search for new ways of governing ourselves, making decisions, and sharing both power and responsibility.
- Feminist movement-builders—especially younger generations of activists—are creating **new forms of virtual organizing** that are erasing not only space-time barriers, but also many of the other constraints that made it hard to mobilize certain constituencies. Through social networks such as Facebook and Twitter and new communication technologies like cellphones and text messages, a new wave of feminist organizing is taking place that allows even highly isolated and excluded women to come together and build their collective power in ways that were impossible even a decade ago. This has been greatly liberating and empowering, for instance, for lesbian women living in socially and politically oppressive or threatening environments, or for migrant women domestic workers living far from home and unaware of what their rights are in the host country. Movement-building processes and organizations have been able to reach these women, create new virtual gathering spaces, and provide information and support that breaks the stranglehold of social, cultural, geographic, or political boundaries.

## Movement Layers and Connections

### The Life Cycle of Movements

Movements, like people and organizations, also have life cycles. They arise, grow, thrive, achieve impact and even fame, and then, sometimes, go into phases of dormancy, retreat, or decline. Chronologically old movements are not necessarily the most vibrant or successful ones. Movements don't have to live forever—indeed, if they are successful, they probably should fade away as their political agendas are achieved and their constituents reap the fruits of change. Some movements give birth to others—witness the number of other movements that early feminist movements have themselves mothered. But if their agenda has not been achieved, or their collective power has become diminished, it is vital for movements to renew and re-build themselves.

Interesting work on the life cycle of nonprofit organizations has highlighted five stages in their life cycle, and we have adapted these to approximate the life cycle of movements as well:

**Stage One: Imagine and Inspire**

We know what we want to change, and who needs to be involved in the change

**Stage Two: Found and Frame**

Building our theory of change and deciding how we will begin the process of change

**Stage Three: Ground and Grow**

Mobilizing and building the organizations of our constituents

**Stage Four: Struggle and Learn**

Engage the targets of change and experiment with different strategies to see what works

**Stage Five: Review and Renew**

What have we learnt so far and how do we re-configure our structure, agenda, strategies, and tactics for the next stage of action?

While these stages will seem familiar to many of us, we also know that things are not always as sequential or linear as these stages appear. In reality, organizations as well as movements may jump across stages, or may seem to be in decline and decay and suddenly reinvent themselves, while others that seem to be thriving may rapidly burn out or fall apart from internal conflicts. Still others go through all these stages in a continuous spiral of rebirth, growth, decay and rebirth.

We are clearly in a historic moment when feminists must review the relationships of their organizations to movements, understand much more clearly where they locate themselves within the larger constellation of organization-movement relationships. We must also think much more creatively about how to build new movements or revitalize existing ones, and locate the strategies that can best achieve this in the current global and local political and economic context. In the report *Great Transitions: The Promise and Lure of the Times Ahead*, Raskin et al say:

*“In the past, new historical eras emerged organically and gradually out of the crises and opportunities presented by the dying epoch. In the [current] planetary transition, reacting to historical circumstance is insufficient. With the knowledge that our actions can endanger the wellbeing of future generations, humanity faces an unprecedented challenge—to anticipate the unfolding crises, envision alternative futures and make appropriate choices. The question of the future, once a matter for dreamers and philosophers, has moved to the center of the development... agenda” (13).*

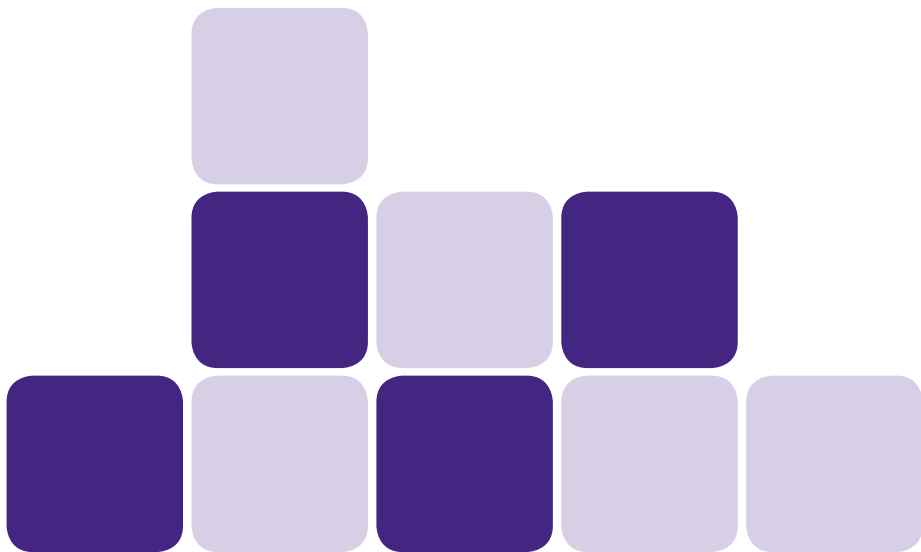
We hope this kind of reflection is useful input in our own great transition, into the processes of renewing and rebuilding feminist movements.

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## CHAPTER 2

### BFEMO CASE STUDY SUMMARIES





## The Seeds of a Movement—Disabled Women and their Struggle to Organize by Janet Price

### A Summary of the Case Study

#### Context

Since the 1970s, disabled peoples in differing global locations have increasingly realized that their interests and needs were not being served—that projects were not being designed in ways that they would have chosen and that ultimately, they were not in control of their lives. This led to the creation of self-help and single-issue disabled people’s organizations (DPOs) run by and for disabled people, addressing needs identified by their members. The creation of such groups, and networking between their members, marked the beginnings of the disability movement. For instance, the resistance to charitable approaches saw the establishment of several international DPOs (Hans and Patri, 1990), whilst the impact of organizations of disabled Vietnam War veterans in the USA, marked the rise of the campaigns for *Rights not Charity*.

The year 1981 was designated the UN International Year for the Disabled, changed after intense lobbying to the International Year of Disabled People. Disabled Peoples International (DPI), was established that same year as a self-advocacy global organization, and operates not only at the international level but regionally, nationally and locally, with a large representation of disabled people from the majority world (mainly men) having senior roles within it. It has played a major role in the creation of greater disability awareness, particularly within the UN system, and has served as a powerful force in bringing disabled people together in planning for the Disability Rights Convention. Giving further impetus to the rise of disabled people organizing was the adoption by the UN General Assembly of The Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, on December, 9, 1975.

However, despite progress at the international level, disabled women<sup>1</sup> have in general been silenced within society, including by feminist movements, and denied their rights and equal economic and social opportunities due to prejudice, stigma and poverty. They face a pattern of discrimination that repeats itself globally, in differing forms, in rich countries as well as poor. The fear, anxiety, vulnerability and ignorance people experience when encountering disability are translated into societal restrictions on disabled women’s access to educational opportunities and to health care, and limits to their employment options, where they tend to be restricted to poorly paid and low-status jobs. Viewed as incapable of handling the maternal role and as carriers of malfunctioning genes, they are derided as mothers and denied children, too often through forced sterilisation. They are subject to physical, mental and sexual violence and abuse, both in the domestic and the public arena, and in the institutions to which some disabled women are committed. The negative perceptions of disabled women and the prejudice and oppression they face lead to low self-image for many. And when and if they challenge all this, they are met with incomprehension and, despite the new UN Convention, a marked lack of social and legal rights.

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1. Within this document, the terminology disabled woman is used, rather than women with disabilities, (known as the person first approach). This latter has been adopted within the UN Convention on Rights for People with Disabilities, on the basis that one is a woman first and disability is a secondary characteristic.

There have been several other aspects of disability organizing and politics that have worked against disabled women, including the male domination of disabled peoples' organizations and movements; the male-centric nature of disabilities theory and thinking, which shapes political agendas; the lack of analysis and awareness of the intersectionality of disability politics with race and class, as well other structures of discrimination; and lack of representation at bargaining and decision making tables. Underscoring all of this, women's movements and feminist scholars have been incredibly slow at getting their heads around disability as a *political* issue, rather than a charity or welfare concern.

Given the male domination of the disability movement, disabled women who were politically active often drew upon feminism to aid their analysis of the gendered character of disability oppression. However, this was not a two-way process until early in the new millennium when for example, women's activists, especially those working on health issues in low-income countries, were beginning to explore political alliances with disabled women—e.g., the rise and spread of HIV and AIDS across Africa; the use of the pre-natal diagnostic and sex-selection technologies to identify and abort both female and disabled children in a new eugenic impulse, especially affecting India and the South Asian countries.

## Disability Organizing and Strategies

Disabled women's awareness of the oppression they face and their attempts to organize themselves date back at least to the days of "second wave" feminism in the 1970s. To organize and campaign for their rights, disabled women face all the difficulties that non-disabled women face, but mediated by disability.

Disabled women are finding other disabled women to relate to and share experiences with, sparking a growing self-confidence, and marking the beginnings of consciousness, self-help groups and political organizing. They are not only involved in establishing local disabled peoples organizations, but are contributing to the growth in national level

bodies and inter-country linkages. One major stimulus for disabled women coming together across national boundaries was the establishment of the Platform for Action for the Beijing Conference in September 1995. An international symposium on the day before the Fourth World Conference on Women, brought together about 200 disabled women from 25 countries, and they were able to agree on a common strategy and position for disabled women to lobby for in the main conference. Assisted by the widespread consultation and awareness raising that marked the development of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), they are tentatively laying down the markers of emerging—if not yet solidified—international networks, which may form the basis of a future transnational disabled women's movement. In order to build the movement in the face of strong challenges, there are a variety of strategies being employed; a few of them are outlined below.

Coalition building pulls together smaller local disabled women organizations and offers the potential ability to undertake broader initiatives, drawing on the skills and experience of the local groups and simultaneously offers contacts, research and insights gained from negotiating with government officials, funding organizations, and international bodies' representatives at national level.

Strengthening organizations of disabled women established at the national level have played a vital role in supporting the strategic and practical interests of disabled women across their countries. Some disabled women's groups have evolved over time into established, committed, campaigning groups with clear political agendas and constituencies, and can probably be termed movements, though they may still call themselves organizations or networks, e.g., Disabled Women's Network Ontario (DAWN Ontario) and Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA).

Advocacy and awareness-raising, particularly in relation to the UN Rights agenda, are an important part of strengthening disabled women's networks, e.g., the establishment the UN Convention on RPD (or CRPD). A highly organized group of disabled women have influenced the structure and form of the CRPD, ensuring that women were included and their rights addressed in a clear and



comprehensive manner. This task has been vital for establishing disabled women's rights.

One of the ways in which disabled women are making strides in connecting with each other is through the internet, which has helped overcome at least some of the challenges to disabled women's organizing mentioned earlier—challenges faced in travelling, with physical access, and communicating. Disabled women are slowly discovering that the internet can act for them as a political tool, enabling contact, building communities, and enhancing political action, e.g., d-Wild e-group after Beijing. The web is used in multiple ways: for general discussion and information sharing, to address and accumulate knowledge about issues faced by disabled women, to prepare and comment on report or petition the UN and other international/national bodies, to build awareness and solidarity, to run campaigns, and to offer personal support.

## ■ Movement Achievements and the Future

Beijing marked a watershed in terms of disabled women's inclusion in women's struggle for rights, even though the platform document did not spell out what disabled women's specific barriers to accessing their rights were (Darnborough 2003). The swell of activity and awareness that has been raised through the planning and campaigning towards the establishment of the UN CRPD has led to greater clarity about the breadth of possibilities for disabled women to build movements within and across countries within the majority world. Yet, disabled women's movements cannot depend only upon links to major international bodies like the UN. The constituencies on which we build our agendas, and the coalitions we form will be vital to our movements' futures as will be our politics, in guiding the choices we make.

The future is impossible to predict. Yet, we look to a time of widespread recognition of the place of disabled people, and disabled women, in our world— where our inclusion in all that happens around us comes with the acknowledgement of us all as fully embodied women, vulnerable and strong, ever changing, working in solidarity alongside others, towards our dreams in a world where we may all potentially flourish.





## **GALANG: A Movement in the Making for the Rights of Poor LBTs in the Philippines** by Anne Lim

### A Summary of the Case Study

#### Context

In order for the Philippine Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) movement to gain ground in advocating to and for the rights of sexual minorities, activists could no longer ignore the huge socioeconomic gaps that existed in the country.<sup>1</sup> GALANG registered with the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission as a non-governmental organization (NGO) on August 29, 2008 to give a voice to economically disadvantaged sexual minorities who are often not heard, if not completely forgotten, in the class-biased local discourse on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. While there are a number of LGBT organizations in the Philippines, as well as a lot of NGOs working on issues of economic justice, particularly with respect to the urban poor, GALANG is the only development organization whose working model involves grassroots community organizing of lesbians, bisexual women, and trans men (LBTs<sup>2</sup>) living in poverty. Given the context, the initial intent of GALANG's lesbian founders was not movement building, but rather to catalyze change in the fledgling Philippine LGBT movement.

Under Philippine law, homosexual behavior is not criminalized and while the Bill of Rights is silent on the protection of sexual minorities, it upholds the equality of all persons. However, the lives of Filipino LGBTs are replete with stories of discrimination for which they have no legal recourse. Skilled and qualified LGBTs are deprived of jobs on the basis of perceived immorality. Lesbians continue to be raped and beaten, sometimes by their own families, to “cure” them of their lesbianism or because their male peers are challenged by their seeming imperviousness to male attention. Gay men and trans people suffer from harassment by law enforcement, who cite outdated criminal laws on morality to extort money from their defenseless prey.

The anti-discrimination bill is most often referenced when talking about LGBT activism in the Philippines. LGBT human rights advocates have been trying to pass a bill seeking to protect LGBT rights since 1999, but the bill has largely been ignored by Philippine legislators for almost over a decade now and has once again failed to get enacted. The Roman Catholic Church as well as fundamentalist Christian groups in the country have been at the forefront of the opposition to the anti-discrimination bill. GALANG felt it was urgent to develop a model for organizing LGBTs in poverty—who comprise the majority— because without a critical mass of organized Filipino LGBTs, activist voices would continue to be drowned out by fundamentalists who, with the backing of the Religious Right in the West, and armed with political power and financial resources, would continue to deprive them of visibility, voice, and rights.

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1. Out of the nearly 88 million Filipinos, 27 million are poor, earning less than US \$320 per year or less than enough for their basic needs; and the gap between the rich and poor is significant, around 20% percent of the rich hold half of the country's total family income (National Statistics Office, *Philippine Poverty Statistics*, 2007, 2006).
  2. LBT is distinct from LGBT in that the latter includes not only lesbians, bisexual women, and trans men, but also seeks to encompass a wider range of sexual identities including men who self-identify as gay, homosexual or bisexual; trans women or persons labeled as males at birth but self-identify as female; as well as persons who label themselves as transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual or celibate. GALANG's leaders decided to focus on organizing poor LBTs and aims to foster a separate safe space for economically disadvantaged lesbians, bisexual women, and trans men.

## Organizational Structure

GALANG started out in mid 2008 as a small group of lesbian friends who were either keenly observing or actively engaged in the LGBT activist community in the Philippines. The NGO takes pride in being a lesbian-initiated, lesbian-run feminist human rights organization that works with LBTs in urban poor communities. GALANG started out as a loose group of activists, and its founders selected their officers partly according to their respective skills and competencies as well as time available. The group committed to promoting and adhering to non-hierarchical leadership structures and decision-making by consensus. Like most lesbian organizations in the Philippines, GALANG operates as a collective made up of peers. Its Board of Trustees makes decisions by consensus and, when it requires guidance, seeks the advice of the Advisory Committee. Until very recently, GALANG did not have paid staff, and programs were implemented by a working Board of volunteer professionals, with the help of GALANG's advisers and local leaders.

## Strategies and the GALANG Organizing Model

GALANG chose to explore grassroots community organizing as its core strategy because this model is consistent with the organization's bottom-to-top approach to development, where the people have a direct hand in improving their condition and are not treated as mere recipients of aid or passive receptacles of knowledge. When discussions and key informant interviews initiated by GALANG revealed that LBTs in its organizing areas were less visible yet more susceptible to horizontal hostility, rape, physical abuse, suicide, and unemployment than gay men, it was logical for GALANG's lesbian founders to decide to focus on organizing and building the capacities of urban poor lesbians, bisexual women, and trans men. To that end, GALANG uses a variety of strategies.

- Leadership formation and capacity building of grassroots women are crucial strategies for facilitating the creation of a critical mass of people who can push for policies protecting LBT human rights. GALANG seeks to build the capacities of local LBTs so that they can be their own advocates who assert their rights and make state actors accountable to their immediate community—the *barangay*—and to the LGBT constituency as a whole.
- Another key strategy is to strengthen partnerships and alliances with advocates to push policies in support of LBT human rights at all levels across sectors. GALANG recognizes the need to continuously build and deepen relationships with other human rights and LGBT-allied organizations including legislative champions, private sector actors, the media, and other private and public stakeholders for them to help in improving the access of urban poor LBTs to basic social services. For example, GALANG's campaign against homophobia has been shared with allies across national borders, such as during the 16 Days of Activism Campaign in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2008 and TARSHI's Regional Institute on Sex, Society in India in 2009. GALANG has a strong alliance with the Likhaan Center for Women's Health. To help GALANG address the problem of unhealthy lifestyles, risky sexual behavior, and lack of access to health care among poor LBTs, Likhaan provides primary health care to indigent women and has agreed to provide free medical consultations to GALANG's community partners.
- Moreover, because reliable data on poor lesbians, bisexual women, and trans men in the country is sorely lacking, GALANG carefully documents its interventions and conducts research activities to strengthen its advocacy for LBT human rights. For instance, through GALANG's documentation of cases of rape and other forms of sexual abuse against poor LBTs, it has uncovered several cases of rape of butch lesbians, some resulting in unwanted pregnancies, often committed by the victims' own male friends or drinking buddies. Similarly, GALANG is documenting cases of urban poor LBTs who have been denied employment on the basis of their perceived sexual deviance.
- Finally, GALANG launched the first issue of its groundbreaking community comic book series in 2010 that promotes positive images of LBTs, a means of operationalizing The Yogyakarta Principles, a set of international equality and

non-discrimination principles on the application of international law to human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

## Achievements and the Future

For GALANG, the most important accomplishment thus far is having been accepted as a genuine partner by both LBT and straight individuals and grassroots organizations in the area. The organization is encouraged by the response of local government officials whose cooperation it has earned by consciously maintaining a relationship that is respectful, firm, and transparent. For instance, some local officials have requested GALANG to expand the geographical scope of its work to include organizing LBTs on a district-wide basis. Local lawmakers of both partner communities have also passed ordinances against LGBT discrimination in the last two years, at around the same time that GALANG began to mobilize LBTs in their areas. These local laws prohibit and penalize acts of discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity such as refusal of employment, denial of entry to an establishment with no legal ground, and refusal to provide medical services to an LGBT person. GALANG has contributed to raising awareness on the plight of Filipino LBTs in urban poor communities. The visible presence of 31 poor LBTs marching as one during the 2009 Manila Gay Pride March encouraged some fellow activists to look at discrimination and homophobia in a new light.

While significant breakthroughs have been made, changes in the culture of fatalism among LBTs in poverty will take time. Indeed, an organizer must start where the people are, but must not end where they are. For a very young lesbian organization, GALANG is on its way to making substantial contributions to the Philippine LGBT and feminist movements by virtue of its clear focus on organizing urban poor LBTs and building a mass base.

# The VAMP/SANGRAM Sex Worker's Movement in India's Southwest

by the SANGRAM/VAMP Team

## A Summary of the Case Study

### Context

The HIV and AIDS discourse, the location of sex workers within it, and the impact of the epidemic itself played a catalytic role in the formation of the SANGRAM/VAMP sex workers movement. The neglect of sex workers by HIV prevention programs—especially in the early stages of the epidemic in India—demonstrated that women in sex work, though stigmatized as vectors, were actually considered dispensable. In the sex trade, vulnerability to HIV is mediated by poverty and power, by knowledge and risk perception, by access to health services, and by the violence of stigma, discrimination and abuse. Female sex workers are marginalized both as women and as members of a highly stigmatized group, greatly increasing their risk. Public morality on prostitution, patriarchal norms related to female sexuality, and the accompanying blaming and labeling of women in prostitution are critical elements of their HIV risk. It was in this context of the AIDS pandemic that in 1992, Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha (SANGRAM), a women's rights NGO, and VAMP, a sex workers' collective that emerged from SANGRAM's peer education work, decided to organize and build a community-based movement of sex workers in India's Maharashtra state, to give them a voice and build collective responses to the challenges confronting them.

### Feminist positions on prostitution

Historically, feminist thought has often framed prostitution as symbolic of the oppression, victimization, and exploitation of womanhood. It looks at prostitution through the framework of a rigid understanding of patriarchy, viewing it as objectifying women's bodies, and as the commercialization of sex. The victim imagery has also engendered several positions on prostitution. Those who see women in sex work as slaves, advocate the complete eradication of prostitution—this is known as the abolitionist position. Another feminist position is reformist, where women in prostitution are seen as in need of rescue and reform because they have been tricked or trafficked into sex work, or suffer false consciousness. Rescue and rehabilitation strategies are used here, to save these women from sex work and then rehabilitate them in alternate work. A third approach is the regulatory one, which accepts that prostitution is here to stay, and therefore needs regulation. Laws like

India's Immoral Traffic Prevention Act 1956 (ITPA) are a reflection of this approach. Finally, there is the rights-based approach—which is silent on the merits or morality of sex work, but contends that women in sex work should have the same rights and entitlements as any other citizen, and that the state must act as the duty bearer of these rights. SANGRAM and VAMP are moving beyond these positions and working from an empowerment approach, building a sex workers' movement to challenge stigma and discrimination, enhance power and rights, and change feminist and public discourse on sex work.

### Organizational Structure of VAMP

The idea of VAMP as an independent collective emerged in 1995, by which time 150 women sex workers had become peer educators—i.e., sex workers who raised awareness, shared empowering information on health, legal rights, and public

services, and helped organize their peers. SANGRAM's peer educator process resulted in the establishment of VAMP—the *Veshya<sup>1</sup> AIDS Muqabla Parishad* (Prostitutes Against AIDS) in 1996, which changed its name in 1998 to *Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad* (Forum for the Liberation of Prostitutes from Injustice). Early on, women agreed that they wanted a registered, volunteer-based organization of their own that would work in partnership with SANGRAM. SANGRAM's role was largely guidance and advice, while the collective was to function independently with its own administrative and executive board.

As part of the division of responsibilities between the two organizations, VAMP now runs the peer education program in eight districts in Maharashtra, with the help of SANGRAM. By functioning as a loose collective, VAMP is able to attract women to join the sex workers movement; it currently has over five thousand women in sex work as members. The membership is not formal and is need-based. Any woman in sex work from the 'sites' where VAMP works is entitled to the services offered, can attend the weekly *mohalla* (neighborhood) committee meetings, make a complaint, or help in arbitration of community disputes. VAMP holds weekly meetings where decisions are made on how to go about mediating community disputes, lobbying with the police, helping colleagues access government health systems and facilitating leadership potential among members.

## VAMP's Strategies

VAMP's peer-based strategy is designed so that sex workers are not the 'foot soldiers' while activists with social work degrees are the coordinators. Rather, this program is managed, run and implemented by sex workers from top to bottom. At the heart of this process is the collective, and the building of sex workers' collective power and rights. SANGRAM/VAMP's emphasis on forging a collective identity helped to build a rare solidarity among women sex workers. No longer were they sex workers competing for clients, patronage and resources,

but women who shared experiences of multiple discriminations and exclusions, their rights ignored and violated. The women came to identify as part of a marginalized community who were vulnerable not only to HIV and AIDS but to social stigma and public violence, by the very fact of being women in sex work. Some of VAMP's strategies over the past years include:

- *Working with truckers:* In 2000, VAMP started a program to convince truck drivers, and other transport workers, to treat their STDs and prevent HIV. Truck drivers are often the favourite clients of women sex workers, who report that they are the least violent.
- *Working with the children of sex workers:* Children of sex workers often face stigma and discrimination from an early age—such as being taunted and ostracized at school. Staff members of the program are adult children of women in sex work. It was through their experiences of being discriminated at school, especially by teachers, that the idea of making education more accessible to children of sex workers emerged.
- *Working with men who have sex with men (MSM):* In 2000, a small group of men approached SANGRAM to start a program for MSM, named Muskan. In its first phase, Muskan reached out to more than 600 men, treating at least 40 STD cases and identifying three HIV-positive persons in one year.
- Additionally, peer educators have taken the initiative to reach new, unorganized communities of sex workers. For example, they carried out a survey of married women who are in sex work in order to discover how to reach this largely hidden group.
- Reaching out to the women's movement has also helped in articulating and documenting human rights violations so that justice can be sought for violence against sex workers. But building these alliances has not been easy. Feminists have emphasized the elimination of sex work as a goal over and above the rights of sex workers. The challenge has been therefore to talk about these rights with communities of activists.

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1. The ancient Indian term for prostitutes



## ■ Impact of the Sex Workers Movement and the Future

The sex workers movement has been successful on many counts. The peer education program was able to strengthen the sex worker community from within and help the women forge a common identity, and to set their own agenda and priorities—the awareness it brought or actions it facilitated were never imposed. The movement has opened up spaces for multiple realities and competing narratives to be heard, each with its own integrity. By mobilizing women sex workers, by creating a positive identity, and by building their leadership and capacity, many women in the movement now take pride in themselves. Other successes of the sex workers' movement include gradually altering the understanding among other social movements from one of sex workers as victims to recognizing them as a constituency with human rights, and fully capable of advocating for themselves and demanding their rights.

## Women Building Peace: The Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace in Sudan by Zaynab El Sawi

### A Summary of the Case Study

#### Context

The conflict between North and South Sudan started in 1983, although its roots lay in the first Sudanese civil war of 1955 to 1972. The conflict lasted between 1983 and 2005, for the most part in southern Sudan, and killed over 1.9 million civilians. More than 4 million Southerners were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in the north of the country or in neighboring countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Uganda. A majority of the displaced people were women and children.

Over the years, efforts to restore peace—particularly between the government in Khartoum and the Sudanese People Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in the South—was an uphill task. In 1993, a ray of hope came with the establishment of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional conflict resolution and development body that was to sponsor efforts to end the civil war in Sudan through a series of peace talks between the government forces in Khartoum and the SPLM/A. In 1994, IGAD drafted a Declaration of Principles (DOP) that included separation of state and religion, and the recognition of the right of self-determination for the South. From 1994 onwards, peace talks continued at different times. Things looked hopeful when the government and SPLM/A signed the Machakos Protocol on July 20, 2002, and the need to hold a referendum on South Sudan's self-determination was acknowledged. The government and SPLM/A signed a ceasefire, and a security deal in the same year, clearing a major stumbling block in peace talks. Finally, the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005 marked the formal conclusion of the 22-year long civil war between the Sudanese Government and the SPLM/A.

During the 1990s, at the height of the conflict, Sudanese women from both north and south started coming together to advocate for peace. This eventually led to the formation of the Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace (SuWEP), an umbrella body bringing together women from the two regions, and also from different ethnic, socio-economic and political backgrounds. The idea behind the formation of SuWEP goes as far back as 1994 when Southern Sudanese Women in Nairobi (SWAN) came together to brainstorm ways and means of ending the longest and most dehumanizing conflict in the world and to foster sustainable peace in the Sudan. At the time, many Sudanese civil society organizations, such as Sudanese Women Voice for Peace (SWVP), New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), and New Sudan Women Federation (NSWA), SWAN and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) Women Movement and Sudanese Mission for Peace (CMP) were involved.

However, the initial attempts at forging a unified intervention in the peace process had gravitated around SWAN. Even though the initial focus of SWAN was mainly groups from South Sudan, after 1998, they initiated links with Northern groups and became more inclusive. At the end of 1997, the government of the Netherlands through the Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE) in Sudan and Kenya initiated a facilitation process in support of Sudanese women engendering ongoing peace-building efforts. This built on the *ad hoc* peace building work already occurring among women's groups in the North and South of the country as well as in Nairobi. Finally, in 2001, it was decided to adopt the name of Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace—or SuWEP—as a way of establishing the broadened ownership of the initiative.

## The Emergence of the Sudanese Women's Movement

During the early independence period, Sudan had one of the earliest and most vigorous women's movements in the Arab and African worlds. The women's movement in Sudan emerged from the anti-colonial and nationalist movements that were at the heart of social changes during the 1950s and 1960s in Sudan. It was through this liberation struggle that Sudanese women were able to secure their political and economic rights and some of their social rights. Throughout these two decades, the Sudan Women Union (SWU) was the only body that consistently called for the respect of women's rights. Their successes were highjacked by the Nimeiry regime when his government decided to create its own "Sudan Women Union" in 1971. This "new" SWU would no longer challenge the government policies and could no longer be considered a neutral actor in the promotion of women's rights. The old SWU was forced to work underground. There was no longer a Sudanese platform for women with progressive ideas to come together. The war between North and South started again in 1983, and after the 1989 coup d'état that brought Bashir to power, the war became more of an Islamic jihad, or holy war. This shift was also marked by the acceleration of a culture of war promoted by the state, and in which women were instrumental.

Sudanese women realized that they had to break from tradition and recognize their rights as human rights. Within this context, SuWEP emerged as a social movement based on pursuing a common political agenda for change through collective action. SuWEP gathered women from all parts of the Sudan and encouraged them to seek peace and demand their inclusion in peace negotiations and representation in decision-making positions to guarantee sustainable peace.

## Organizational Structure

SuWEP has a formal membership that consists of nine women's groups; (five in the northern sector and four in the southern sector); membership of each group varies in terms of nature and

number. SuWEP's community base in both north and south consists of 85 member organizations (NGOs, CBOs, and GNGOs) and each member organization has its own community base of women members. The political groups consist of women leaders from nine different political parties. The ethnic groups consist of Nuba and southern tribes living in the north. Through all these entities, the number of women that are directly involved and active within SuWEP exceeds 1000, not including community-based beneficiaries. All SuWEP's formal member groups are governed by democratically elected committees, and each group nominates their representatives to the SuWEP Committee. SuWEP's constituency base cuts across different strata of women from different paths of life, and is producing women leaders from political parties, civil society organizations, and ethnic groups.

## Strategies

SuWEP started with the common aim to stop the war, and the initial strategy was to defuse the hostility between the northern and southern communities by promoting negotiations as the only viable tool to conflict resolution. Toward this end, SuWEP lobbied the political parties in the north and south to talk and listen to each other, and pressed for the inclusion of the women agenda in negotiations that took place prior to the signing of the CPA including at the Machakos, Naivasha, and Abuja talks. In the post-peace interim period, SuWEP's focus shifted to the proper and just implementation of the CPA, by empowering women to participate in all peace building and development processes to ensure the recognition and realization of women's rights. Today, SuWEP's goal is to raise community awareness and build the capacity of a second generation of young SuWEP women to safeguard the achievements made thus far, promote a culture of peace, and move forward the women's rights agenda.

SuWEP's strategies are built on women's own strategies and capacities, and include:

- Building links and solidarity among all Sudanese women to act as a common front for women's intervention in peace and sustainable development processes.



- Building alliances with and lobbying for support for Sudanese women and men in achieving just and lasting peace in New Sudan.
- Serving as a forum for sharing information between groups involved in the reconstruction process and women of the Sudanese Diaspora, as well as the CPA implementation phase.
- Lobbying for the international community's attention and support to the community at regional and international forums, including negotiation meetings and conferences.

in July 2011, the process of building a culture of peace will be tested in new ways as they struggle to ensure a peaceful transition into the new configuration of North and South Sudan. Raising women's awareness of the need for gender equality is an integral part of these processes. Most of all, SuWEP has enabled Sudanese women to demonstrate their capacity to inform and transform the peace process in fundamental ways.

## Achievements and the Future

Transforming people from a culture of war and violence to the level where they can discuss peace, social justice and development is SuWEP's greatest achievement. SuWEP women overlooked their cultural, religious, racial and political differences and came together in search of peace, sacrificing their time, energy and money to attain this one goal. The fruits of women's efforts to promote a peace culture are visible in the establishment of Peace Centers in Nairobi, Southern Kordufan and Blue Nile. It is also evident in the increased desire by women to participate in peace negotiations nationally, regionally and internationally; in the focused training of community leaders on peace issues, in concerted efforts towards building a peace culture among children and youth, and in the way women demanded that warring parties allow the safe passage of food aid to women in the war zones. SuWEP's successes over the years have also resulted in women's increased participation in the democratic transformation process, which has resulted in the 25% quota for women in the 2010 elections.

Looking ahead, several challenges confront the movement. As the socio-political context of Sudan changes continuously, and with the secession and formation of an independent South South, Sudanese women must continue to develop strategies that respond effectively to the opportunities, dynamics and threats of the country's turbulent environment. This means that SuWEP's approach will have to be based on flexible planning and optimizing the participation of women's organizations, taking into account their changing needs and priorities. Given the secession of Southern Sudan

# Women in the Indigenous Peoples' Movements of Mexico: New Paths for Transforming Power

by Marusia López Cruz

A summary of the Case Study

Mexico is a pluriethnic, pluricultural country—the indigenous population numbers 12.7 million people, representing 13% of the national population. However, the Mexican state, far from recognizing and protecting the rights of its indigenous people, has always maintained, tolerated, and even promoted xenophobia and the excessive exploitation of this population's resources and labour, which not only undermines existing cultural diversity, but also puts the identity, sovereignty, and governability of the nation at risk. This historic marginalization and discrimination against all indigenous people particularly affects women in all spheres of life whether social, economical or political.

In the 1970s an indigenous movement (lead by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, EZLN) emerged and began to question the official line regarding a homogenous, racially, and culturally integrated nation. Against this backdrop, indigenous women began to seek out spaces for coming together and expressing their own demands which allowed for more active participation in their own communities and in the national indigenous movement. The participation and leadership achieved by the Zapatista women (the existence of women commanders and spokespeople in the ranks of the EZLN, the role they played in the process of negotiating with the government, among other things), represented the symbolic arrival of women into leadership spaces and to the recognition of an agenda of their own within the indigenous people's movement.

The momentum generated by this initiative resulted in an assembly constituting the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) in 1996, when indigenous women participants took on the task of forming a special women's commission, through which they could participate with a voice of their own in all the spaces of indigenous organization. One year after the CNI was formed, the women pushing for this commission coincided on the need to count on a space of their own that would be national in scope and serve for analysis and reflection. In order to achieve this, an alliance was necessary between different women who already had exerted strong leadership within their organizations or communities, as well as feminist organizations close to them. The main result of this alliance was the formation of the National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women (*Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas*, CNMI) which brought together more than 700 women from the country's different indigenous peoples.

## The National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women

### Organisational Structure and Goals

The National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women is a network with a presence in 14 states of Mexico that consists of indigenous women's groups and state wide women's networks. The National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women is led by a Coordinator elected every two years who is charged with representing the organization, facilitating the participation of its members in different events to which they are

invited, and implementing the decisions made in the annual assembly, which is made up of representatives from all the states that have a presence in the organization. In the assemblies, formative issues are defined, participants are informed about the advances and limitations of each group; and the Coordinator is elected on a rotating basis. Most of the assemblies are held in Mexico City, the site of the Coordinating Committee offices.

The initial goal of the CNMI was to provide a broad, inclusive space in which the voices of indigenous women could be heard. Even though the Coordinating Committee's initial goal is still in effect, the agenda has gradually been transformed since the group was founded.

The current agenda can best be described by dividing it into four major issues:

- Defence of the fundamental demands of the national indigenous movement;
- The need for State policies that respond to its demands;
- Political participation;
- The transformation of the traditional practices and customs that limit its development and place its integrity at risk.

In essence, the agenda of the Coordinating Committee is characterized by its denunciation of the economic oppression and racism that marks the insertion of indigenous peoples into the national project, at the same time that it struggles within its organizations and communities to change those elements that exclude and oppress women.

## Strategies and Achievements

The main strategies adopted by the Coordinating Committee are strengthening indigenous women's organizations and the inclusion of their demands in public policy priorities and the agendas of social movements. Members of the Coordinating Committee define training needs and conduct training programs that aim at strengthening the organization by focusing on issues like leadership, critical analysis of traditional practices and customs, and the rights of women. Another fundamental strategy for strengthening organization and leadership has been participation in indigenous women's Latin American initiatives. The regional platform has made it possible for women to rely on a reference network that lends legitimacy to their national work and opens up opportunities for participation in a number of different international events. Many of the Coordinating Committee's efforts have been geared towards strengthening their leadership and gaining recognition as an important part of the indigenous movement. The CNMI has also promoted the participation of indigenous women in diverse forums of the feminist movement, both nationally and internationally, in order to align their goals with international feminist ideals. The tie with the feminist movement has been an important factor in the analysis of its position with indigenous

women and has allowed the Coordinating Committee to weave an important network of alliances.

The Coordinating Committee has had great success in establishing itself as the only national movement of indigenous women that has consolidated itself as a touchstone for the defense of their rights. Their work over the last ten years has made a tremendous impact on the lives of women, their communities, and organizations of the indigenous movement. Women that participate in the Coordinating Committee have been able to empower themselves in different spheres of life. Many of these women have begun to exert more leadership in positions of community authority and in mixed organizations in the national indigenous movement. Some members of the Coordinating Committee have even been called on by political parties to run for public office and to head popular mobilizations. In the international sphere, the leadership and presence of indigenous women has increased considerably from the time the Coordinating Committee was formed. Despite the opposition of many male indigenous leaders, both the participation and the agenda of women in the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Affairs of the United Nations is now an established reality.

The indigenous women's movement in Mexico and Latin America has played an important role in strengthening the feminist movement. The dialogue carried on in various meetings and forums between feminists and indigenous women's activists has led to many advances that includes broadening the comprehension of how to relate gender identity to other identities; dismantling the view of indigenous women as a vulnerable group lacking the ability and power to bring about changes in their own condition; and recognizing the need to create alliances with other social movements. The critical analysis by indigenous women of traditional customs has led to an acknowledgement of historical questions raised about these practices by feminists regarding their damaging effects on women's lives. It has also encouraged feminists to discard some of their stereotypes about indigenous cultures and to recognize their contribution to the struggle against the ruling system.

## Conclusion

The agenda, strategies, leadership, and alliances of indigenous women who have come together in the National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women now present an opportunity for overcoming social polarization, reconstructing the social fabric from new bases of support, and advancing towards the construction of an inclusive, plural society and a State that guarantees human rights. The voice of the indigenous women of Mexico resounds more intensely day by day and there's no doubt that these women have become a fundamental political actor in re-founding the nation. The tremendous opposition and obstacles that they face are undeniable, but although their presence is uncomfortable for some, it is a reality that no one can deny.

The complexity of the Indigenous women's achievement is well summed up in this quote from Proyecto Colectivo:

*“The new spaces for participation, the multiple dialogues established with various social actors, and a new approach to the rights of women and the rights of indigenous peoples, have necessarily upset gender roles.... All these organizational spaces - whether independent or governmental — may be conceived of as spaces for the production of meaning, a process that has led indigenous women, intentionally or unintentionally, to reflect on their condition, thereby producing an interchange between gender, ethnicity, and social class.” —Proyecto Colectivo<sup>1</sup>*

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1. Proyecto Colectivo, “Viejos y Nuevos Espacios de Poder: Mujeres Indígenas, Organización Colectiva y Resistencia Cotidiana.”

## Against All Odds: The Building of a Women's Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran

by Homa Hoodfar

A Summary of the Case Study

The question of women and gender over the last century has become one of the most frequently debated and highly charged issues in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Such debate in itself is seen as a challenge to the Islamic Republic since in its view, God has ordained women to be wives and mothers and they are to be part of their father's and husband's fiefdom with very limited rights. The state vision and its legal components have been taken to task by Iranian women of various ideological tendencies. Women activists have made a careful analysis of the political context and have set an agenda based on their diagnosis of the rights and the wrongs of women. This case study outlines how women's advocates, over two decades of decentralized and informal/ semi-formal activities, have worked towards mobilizing women and building a robust women's movement.

### 1979: Women and the Iranian Revolution

After almost a century of struggle, women in Iran, despite the strong opposition of religious leaders were finally enfranchised in 1963. In 1967, the first Family Law reform known as the Family Protection Law gave women minimal rights with regards to issues of divorce and custody of children. Women also played a key role in the revolution in 1979 which ultimately led to the fall of the Shah's regime. However, despite their role in the success of the revolution, Iranian women were among the biggest losers with the advent of the new theocratic Islamic Republic's regressive gender ideology. Within two weeks of coming to power, the supreme leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, annulled the Family Protection Law. Within a month of his return to Iran, Khomeini announced that in accordance with Islamic tradition women were barred from becoming judges and two female witnesses were the equivalent of one male. A few days after this announcement, Khomeini declared that women should wear the veil (hijab) at the workplace. This was followed by the segregation of all sporting events and then of public transit.

To protest these actions women activists organised several demonstrations and a rally of thousands of women on March 8<sup>th</sup> International Women's Day. The rally attracted public attention and support, as well as mobs of religious zealots and

paramilitary forces, which under the protection of security forces attacked and injured many protesters. By the start of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) many of the women who had remained active were jailed or forced into exile. By 1981 the regime had dismantled nearly all the rights that women had secured between 1900 and 1979. The only major right women retained was the right to vote, which the regime reasoned would work to its benefit since it still exercised a considerable religious hold over a large segment of women.

### 1980-1988: Changing Conditions and New Forms of Resistance

The end of organized resistance was not the end of women's opposition to the discriminatory treatment of women by the new regime. Their strategy was to adopt methods that could mobilize women broadly against the new measures. Clearly issues of family law would cut across class and ethnicity as it had disadvantaged all women, and thus could be a rallying point for mobilization. While the secularists focused on critiquing the regime's discriminatory gender ideology, most women in the country were willing to give the regime a chance. The voices of many young widows of war martyrs, who faced losing their children to their husband's family in accordance with the Muslim law, joined in

critiquing the regime. Thousands of stories about the unfair treatment of women were circulated in the public sphere through newspapers, women's magazines, and women's religious gatherings at home and in mosques. Lacking any formal political or legal clout, these were the only channels for these women to cultivate public support against these injustices.

The initial indication that these strategies were achieving some impact came when Khomeini finally announced in 1985, that widows of martyrs may retain custody of their children, even if they remarried. A second victory was the introduction of a new marriage contract specifying situations whereby women could apply for divorce as well as leaving room for stipulating other conditions such as the right to work or to continue their education.

### 1989-1996: Lobbying: a New Phase of Activism

The end of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the death of Khomeini opened up a new chapter in Iranian politics. No longer could the regime use the war as an excuse for failure to deliver promised socio-economic improvements. Women hoped that the Ayatollah's absence would make the regime more concerned about its legitimacy.

Perhaps the most outstanding legal reform that women achieved during this period was the passing of a bill for wages for house work, a campaign that had started in the late 1980s to compensate women who had found themselves divorced after many years of marriage, often because their husbands were interested in younger wives. Several prominent women, including the daughter of President Rafsanjani, championed the bill and finally, despite bitter opposition from orthodox religious leaders, wages for housework, *ojrat ol-mesal*, was passed in December 1991.

### 1997-2005

By 1997 the contradiction between the regime's stated gender ideology and the imposition of its purportedly Muslim laws on women was one of the most widely debated issues in public discourse.

During the 1997 presidential election women voters participated in unprecedented numbers and the great majority voted for the most liberal candidate, Khatami, who was least favoured by the establishment. More than 78% of all eligible women cast their ballots, voting for the candidate who seemed most likely to initiate reform.

While social restrictions on women had lessened under the reformist government, many women were greatly disillusioned by the failure to achieve any legal reform. However, the 2003 Nobel Prize for Peace bestowed on Iranian lawyer Shirin Ebadi, a long-time democrat and women's and children's rights activist, created a wave of pride and optimism, and a renewed energy in Iran and within the women's movement. Following the euphoria created by Ebadi's Nobel Prize, several joint meetings between various women's organizations were held to discuss priorities, demands and reforms.

The fact that the reformists failed to make any promises or statements of support, fearing the criticism of the conservatives, resulted in large numbers of women, particularly in Tehran, boycotting the election in 2005. At the same time conservative forces mobilized support in smaller cities, towns and rural regions whose populations tended to be more traditional and conservative. These two factors resulted in the election of the most conservative religious candidate to the Presidency, whose position on gender roles was the most conservative and oppressive of any public or religious official since the passing of Khomeini in 1988.

### Conclusion

The women's movement in Iran does not fit into the classic model of a centralized and coordinated organization with clear leaders. Neither does it subscribe to any grand theories. It is a movement that is organizationally ephemeral and in a constant state of flux—and thus hard to suppress. While individual acts of resistance in many instances render the states' attempt to control and repress ineffective, it also carries with it the danger of women losing sight of the larger movement. However, the fact that this century-old movement has always and continues to transect class and ethnicity makes it one of the most dynamic women's movements in the region.

## The Dalit Women's Movement in India: Dalit Mahila Samiti by Jahnvi Andharia with the ANANDI Collective A Summary of the Case Study

### History and Context

In India, the fight against “untouchability” is long standing, since this system of discrimination against lower castes has been deeply embedded in social, political and cultural tradition. People were deemed untouchable because the work they did involved handling “polluting” materials, e.g. animal hides (leather workers), garbage (cleaners), and human hair (barbers). The fight against this oppressive system was led by the greatest Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a brilliant lawyer from an untouchable caste who went on to draft the constitution of India. Untouchability was abolished and its practice made a punishable offence, and affirmative action policies were implemented by the Government of India to correct historical wrongs.

In the late Sixties, vibrant mass movements of these oppressed castes adopted the name *Dalit*, which is derived from the Sanskrit root verb *dal*, meaning to crack or split. The term Dalit refers to those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate way, and included all women, even of the highest castes, since all women were considered oppressed. The word also inherently denies the notions of *pollution* and *karma*<sup>1</sup> that were used to justify caste hierarchy and exclusion, and rejects the caste system as a whole. Nevertheless, Dalits still face considerable discrimination throughout India. The Dalits make up 16.2% of the total population, but their control over resources of the country is less than 5%. Close to half of the Dalit population lives under the poverty line and even more (62%) are illiterate. Moreover, Dalits are daily victims of the worst crimes and atrocities, far outnumbering other sections of society. In fact, between 1992 and 2000, a total of 334,459 cases were registered nation wide with the police as cognisable crimes against people of Scheduled Castes (SCs).

### The Dalit Mahila Samiti

The Dalit Mahila Samiti (DMS) is an organisation of over 1500 Dalit women located in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (UP). DMS is promoted by Vanangana, a feminist NGO established in 1993 to build a grassroots movement that works to seek justice for marginalised women in UP, especially Dalit women. Vanangana soon felt the need for a separate local women's organisation with a clear Dalit identity, and the Dalit Mahila Samiti was born in 2002.

### Goals

- To change the caste equations in the area/region where they work;
- To promote the leadership of local women;
- To protest against all forms of violence;
- To strategize during election time with members of the upper caste on their own terms to further Dalits women's interests;
- To ensure that the benefits of the government schemes announced under the Dalit party in power flows to all eligible Dalits.

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1. Fate or pre-determined destiny.

## Structure

The leadership of Dalit Mahila Samiti is still evolving and the demarcations of leadership and decision-making are quite fluid. The DMS leaders have developed the ability to organize their work independently, and know when to seek support from Vanangana. The primary decisions about which cases to take and strategies to be adopted are taken by DMS leaders. Every village has two women who are selected by the members of the local DMS group, to represent them at the cluster level. Each Cluster in turn elects a *Adhyaksh* (President), *Koshaadhyaksh* (Treasurer) and a *Sachiv* (Secretary). Similarly at the block level there is a President, Treasurer and Secretary. All the cluster leaders meet once a month to share their experiences and take decisions collectively, and matters that need further discussion are taken to the block level. Representatives from Vanangana attend these meetings and offer information and guidance as required.

## Strategies

DMS women are using nuanced but powerful strategies to challenge untouchability and concepts of impurity. DMS performers go from village to village enacting plays that create awareness about the issue of untouchability. They then enrol women members who pledge to work to end such practices; they also invite men to become “sathidars”—givers of support. DMS is also working on changing discriminatory practices at the household and individual level—they insist, for instance, that Dalit and non-Dalit people share drinking water and eat together, which in turn pushes families to change untouchability practices based on their new understanding of the concepts of purity and impurity (which traditionally reinforce untouchability). Most violence-related cases come through the Dalit Mahila Samiti, and the leadership adopt a strategy of scrutinizing the various elements at play in the case. These are discussed in their various forums—at the cluster-level, and if required, at the regional level. By sharing information, DMS builds solidarity and communicates the support of a larger movement to the victim. In addition, the movement is working on government schemes such as Midday Meals for school-children, to ensure that Dalit children are seated and fed alongside children of other castes.

## Achievements

The achievements of the Dalit Mahila Samiti are many. It has been a major contributor to the formation and development of a Dalit women’s identity, which has helped expand the Dalit movement. The women are aware of the political shifts occurring at the state level with a Dalit woman having become Chief Minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh, but are also alert to the local challenges at hand. The collective nature of the leadership of DMS is a major strength as it is based on collective decision making and not on one or two charismatic leaders. The leadership also comes from a large geographical area, and draws on the extensive experience of many women. Several important cases clearly illustrate the successes of the DMS in exemplifying how the Samiti will fight until justice is won for Dalits in UP. For example, in the ground-breaking case of the murder of a Dalit political activist, the women of DMS in partnership with Vanangana played a crucial role in ensuring that his upper-caste murderers were arrested and punished. Another example was the case of an expectant Dalit woman who was ruthlessly beaten by three upper-caste women. Both these cases were followed closely by the local media and administration, and had it not been for the DMS, they would have been forgotten.

Today, the DMS-Vanangana partnership is a critical force in strengthening and expanding the Dalit women’s movement. This movement of over 1500 women from a remote area in a very feudal, backward part of India has shown its power to challenge injustice and oppression, and enhance equality, justice and dignity for both Dalit women and men.



## Domestic Workers Organizing in the United States

by Andrea Cristina Mercado and Ai-jen Poo

A Summary of the Case Study

### History and Context

Domestic workers in the United States, after several centuries of exclusion from recognition as a real workforce, are fighting to gain respect and power nationally. Domestic workers have played a critical role in the development of economic and social life in the United States. Historically, this workforce has its roots in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the plantation economy that provided the resources and materials for industrialization in the United States. Throughout industrialization, women's work in the home also remained invisible and unrecognized. While serving as a foundation for the growth of the economy, domestic work has consistently been rendered invisible, deliberately and repeatedly excluded from recognition or protection from abuse under the United States labour law. The fact that domestic workers have traditionally been women of colour and immigrant women is also significant since their exploitation represents a key front in the feminist movement as it necessitates understanding and organizing against race, gender and class-based oppression at once.

Despite the critical role that domestic workers play in the current global political economy, in the US they have remained excluded from most basic labour protections and live and work essentially at the whim of their employer. Domestic workers in the United States are predominantly immigrants and women of colour who work long hours for low-wages, without overtime pay, and under extremely isolated conditions. The vast majority of domestic workers struggle to defend their most basic human rights. In New York, for example, 33% of workers surveyed in 2005 face some form of abuse from their employers.<sup>1</sup> There are no standards in the domestic work industry, and the few basic laws that do apply to domestic workers are not enforced. Domestic workers have been left with no choice but to organize, against all odds. It is within this context that organizations fighting for domestic worker rights in the United States have formed.

### The National Workers Domestic Alliance

In June, 2007, over 50 domestic workers from countries of the Global South, now working in US cities, met in Atlanta, Georgia as part of the first United States Social Forum (USSF) for a National Domestic Worker Gathering. Across language barriers and cultural divides, the women shared experiences from organizing in their corners of the country. On the final day of the gathering these household workers decided to form a National Domestic Worker Alliance.

The National Domestic Worker Alliance is composed of grassroots organizations that work towards advancing the rights of domestic/household workers. The goals of this newly formed alliance are to:

1. Collectively bring public attention to the plight of domestic/household workers;
2. Bring respect and recognition to the workforce;
3. Improve workplace conditions; and
4. Consolidate the voice and power of domestic workers as a workforce.

1. Domestic Workers United, "Home Is Where the Work Is: Inside New York's Domestic Work Industry": New York, Data Centre and Domestic Workers United, 2006.

Many of the organizations were already working together to advance these goals. California household worker organizations fought for a state bill that was vetoed by governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2006. In New York, organizations joined forces to pass New York City legislation compelling employment agencies that place domestic workers to educate workers about their rights and employers about their legal obligations in 2003. Currently, they are working together to pass a state-wide Domestic Worker Bill of Rights to establish labour standards including a living wage, health care and basic benefits. The coming together of these organizations has exponentially increased the capacity, visibility and influence of domestic workers as a sector in the social justice movement. Organizations in Miami, Chicago, San Antonio, and Baltimore are reaching out to begin a process of organizing domestic workers locally, and seeking the support of the National Alliance. In addition, other sectors, including the labour movement, are beginning to recognize the strategic role this workforce plays in rebuilding the labour movement.

## Strategies

While the National domestic Workers alliance does not have a collective strategy, its member organizations such as the Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA) in California and the Domestic Workers United (DWU) in New York, are each working to build the power of the domestic workforce. They have similar strategies in that they provide a group setting for workers to share their experiences and help them become empowered to fight for immigrant, women and workers' rights. They draw on strengths of women members as peer mentors, group facilitators, community educators, and organizers. Member-led research on industry working conditions is a crucial part of their work at the local level which they use to share lessons and information about organizing domestic workers. They also place importance on leadership development that supports the political leadership of domestic workers in the organization and the broader movement. These organizations have also conducted several campaigns including lobbying for crucial legislation in their states. In fact, the DWU's Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, if

passed, will be the most comprehensive legislation protecting domestic workers in US history.

## Achievements

While full of challenges and young in its current stage of development, domestic worker organizing in the US has already impacted the broader social justice movement politically, practically and culturally. Practically speaking, domestic workers leadership has already challenged a culture of patriarchy, classism and racism in society as a whole and within the social justice movement as well. This movement has opened the door for hundreds of working-class immigrant women of colour to exercise leadership—organize, inspire and mobilize entire communities for a better future—thus proving that they are precisely the leadership that the social justice movement in the United States has been waiting for. Significantly, the first United States Social Forum was organized and heavily attended by member-based “movement” organizations, rooted in working class communities of colour - many of which are led by women. In many ways the USSF was a manifestation of a profound shift within the social justice movement in the United States, the product of several years of ground work, community organizing, leadership development, and alliance building.

While some of the leaders of this burgeoning movement may not have a strong identification with feminism, the character of their struggle is decidedly pro-women. On a daily basis they are demanding that “women’s” work be recognized and valued, and they are practicing women’s self-determination, asserting their right to make their own decisions and live with respect and dignity.

Culturally, domestic workers organizing has forced the social justice movement to value the many roles women play, as primary income earners, for families at home and abroad, and caregivers for their employers and their own children. Domestic workers have forced people to think more about the invisible labour that makes other work possible, and the importance of recognizing, respecting, and protecting this work under basic human rights principles. In the words of Domestic Workers United members, “We have a dream that one day; all work will be valued equally.”

## Challenges Were Many: The One in Nine Campaign, South Africa

by Jane Benanett<sup>1</sup>

### A Summary of the Case Study

#### History and Context

The history of the women's movement in South Africa is usually described as one that is interlinked with resistance to colonialism and apartheid through the twentieth century. Prior to 1990, feminist analyses of political, cultural, and economic spaces were embedded within different orientations that were struggling to end apartheid. However, in the years immediately preceding 1994 (when the apartheid state was formally dismantled), there was sufficient consensus between different activists and organizations to create a powerful National Women's Charter. The Charter acted as a platform to lobby the new government for concrete provisions towards gender justice. Through the National Women's Charter the women's movement garnered a number of achievements including legal, political and financial reform. Between 1999 (after the first five year wave of enthusiasm about the new state) and 2005, it has been argued that women's movement organizing suffered. It struggled for coherence and connection in the rapids of escalating poverty, lost momentum and concern about both state capacity and will to transform the social and economic axes of power in a way which could realize gender equality "on the ground."

Moreover, the need to combat the transmission of HIV, to curtail sexual violence, and to ensure that women and girls have access to social and political rights has increasingly placed issues of sexuality at the forefront of the women's movement. The initiation of the One in Nine Campaign (ONIC) needs to be understood as rooted in a very specific national context—one of an increasingly difficult economic, political, and social environment in which women's movement organizing has been challenged by issues of direction, alliance, and sustainability; and the option of new frameworks for political activism which link issues of social justice through questions of gender equality and sexual rights.

#### The One in Nine Campaign

The ONIC was launched in February, 2006, at the start of the trial of Jacob Zuma, former Deputy-President of South Africa, who was accused of raping an HIV positive woman friend of the Zuma family. At the time he was also on temporary leave of his official position in connection with another trial. The campaign was formed to express solidarity with the woman in question, as well as other women who speak out about rape and sexual violence. The name of the campaign is based on a South African Medical Research Council (MRC) study on sexual violence conducted in 2005 which indicated that only one out of every nine rape survivors report the attack to the police. This statistic prompted the name "One In Nine". It further notes that statistics indicate that of the cases that *do* reach the courts, less than 5% of the accused rapists are convicted.

#### Objectives and Strategies

The OINC states that their mission is to work with organizations and institutions involved in the issues of HIV and AIDS, violence against women, women's rights, human rights, and lesbian, gay and bisexual activism "to ensure that the issue of the sexual rights of all women is addressed." This is to be done through solidarity building, research, media, legal transformation and direct action. The objectives of the OINC include:

- Building solidarity: To popularize sexual rights with a focus on women's right to sexual autonomy and safe consensual sex;
- Research: to develop a research agenda to effectively monitor and research social and legal aspects of sexual violence and their implications for policy and practice;

1. African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town.

- Media: to harness the power of print and electronic media to educate and inform key institutions and the public about legal and social dimensions of sexual violence;
- Legal transformation: to lobby for the transformation of the justice system and the legal framework so that women who speak out are able to access justice in all stages of the chain;
- Direct action: to demonstrate direct support and solidarity with women who speak out against sexual violence.

In the time since the Jacob Zuma trial, the OINC has undertaken on-going public and media activism to highlight the intransigence of the court system in processing the hearings of rape victims, protesting outside courts, creating petitions, supporting legal interventions, organizing “bus campaigns” of publicity, and focusing on particular cases to develop strategic focus. In July 2007, two lesbian activist women returning from a celebratory function were assassinated in Johannesburg. With some new organizational partners, the OINC took on the primary organization of the *07-07-07 protest*, organizing public activism, building solidarity, monitoring the legal case, and creating a range of resources (including virtual resources) to support the movement to protest the murders.

## Leadership and Structure

There is a consortium of organizations which manage the leadership of the Campaign and the management of the leadership is participative, formally requiring consensus from all participants to address particular issues and strategies, but simultaneously drawing on the available energy and programmatic availability of different organizations. The OINC is led by diverse women, with backgrounds in law, conflict negotiation, sexuality and reproductive rights, HIV, gender-based violence, and most with personal backgrounds of economic struggle (of different kinds). From its initiation, the OINC was consciously building a movement, drawing on the political strengths and areas of expertise of different organizations which had never before been drawn, formally, into a coalition.

The OINC’s terms of reference, that were developed in the months after the Jacob Zuma rape trial, which came to a formal close (May, 2006), are explicit about the feminist principles informing

the Project, to which all members must adhere, and include: (i) The campaign shall be driven and sustained by women’s leadership that aims to create equal power relations within the campaign, through good and democratic governance practices, based on feminist principles of shared leadership and joint decision-making; (ii) the ideological premise for all campaign actions and governance shall be feminism, especially that the personal is political; and (iii) campaign actions will be based on the intersectionality of various forms of oppression.

## Achievements

The effects of the OINC’s work have been powerful. Public protests were organized in 4 major cities after the lesbian activist murders, and integrated into the platforms of a range of different organizations’ work. The combination of the experience of the activism during the Jacob Zuma trial and the outrage of the assassination of the activists (not the first in South Africa as a result of homophobia targeting black lesbians in particular) have both invigorated the coalition, but also led to new demands on coalition members for “holding” the direction of the movement-building. The OINC is a movement-building organization working in a new South African era, where the importance of acknowledging the failure of the defeat of apartheid for women (especially poor black women) is traumatizing, especially to those who worked hard to establish the National Gender machinery, or to reform different laws. The OINC discourse and activism have had a powerful impact on the meaning of feminist organizing in South Africa, taking the leadership around definitions of feminist strategy in a way that is influencing the understanding of the visibility and range of a women’s movement.

*“Challenges were many, but I think what carried us through was the dream of a better world and the fact that we were creating it together. We debated, we supported each other, we challenged the donor community to join hands with us and not just hand out to us.”—Fatma Alloo, founding member, TAMWA (Tanzanian Media Women’s Organization).*

## Mothers as Movers and Shakers: The Network of Mother Centres in the Czech Republic

by Suranjana Gupta

A Summary of the Case Study

### History and Context

The Czech Mothers movement began in 1992 with a small group of mothers trying to counter their isolation and find ways to collectively care for their children. Today it is a sophisticated, mass-based women's civil society movement, growing from one Mothers Centre in Prague to a nation-wide network of over 250 Mother Centres that meet the practical needs of families with young children, while collectively working on a broader set of values that demonstrate why and how Czech society must become "family friendly".

During the Soviet era, the socialist Czech state had always supported women to reconcile their productive and reproductive roles, and enabled them to join the workforce even though their access to employment was not on the same terms as men. With the transition to a market economy, women workers and mothers were particularly hard hit by the loss of social security, and it is against this backdrop of political and economic transition that the Czech Mother's movement was born. Motherhood was considered an integral part of womanhood, and rather than seeing work and family in opposition to one another, Czech women viewed their participation in the workforce as a key element of their family roles.

The Czech Mothers Network evolved from the Prague Mothers Group, a small, informal, underground organization of 20 mothers whose main concern was the poor air quality in Prague and how this was affecting the health of children growing up in the city. Inspired by the German Mother Centres they visited, the Prague Mothers started their first Mother Centre in 1992 in a room in the YMCA in Prague. Today, there are 252 such centres across the Czech Republic that have helped women politicize their roles as caregivers and use this as the basis of creating a strong political voice that influences public policy in response to grassroots women's priorities as both mothers and workers.

### Structure and Goals

In March 2001, at the annual assembly of Czech Mothers, leaders were given the mandate to set up an autonomous association called the 'Network of Mother Centres in the Czech Republic'. By October of the same year, the Network was formally registered with the Ministry of the Interior. In March 2002, the First Plenary Assembly of the newly registered Network of Mother Centres in the Czech Republic elected their first Governing Council. Today, the Governing Council comprises a president and four vice-presidents, all elected by Mother Centres representatives, with each Centre having one vote. There is also an elected

Governing Board that is accountable to the Governing Council for all its actions. The Network of Mother Centres currently focuses on the following issues:

- Bringing parenting and child-raising into the public domain by recognizing and making visible the social contribution women make through child care and rearing;
- Creating dialogue mechanisms that enable citizen-government engagement and collaboration; and
- Promoting new forms of community and infrastructure development that reflects the needs of families with children.

## Strategies and Achievements

The Mother Centres played a crucial role in exposing the ways in which existing policies and practices leave mothers socially and economically marginalized, and by bringing childcare and mothering into the public arena. The 252 Mother Centres currently federated and formalized as a network across villages, towns and cities, enables them to consolidate their identity, clearly articulate their principles and values, and hold a vision of the changes they want to bring about. The efforts of the Mother Centres have created spaces for women to undertake childcare collectively, access child-friendly infrastructure in their neighbourhoods, and influence legislation on social policy.

Through peer support, mentoring, and linkages, the Network of Mother Centres brings together women who advocate for their rights as citizens. These are ordinary women who are empowered to negotiate for public space, finance, and equal opportunities; to organize centres and manage their activities; engage in self-help and dialogue with government officials; and seek systems that respect and respond to family priorities. This helps to build women's self confidence so that they see themselves as caregivers, workers, *and* citizens who can improve the quality of life of children, families and communities. They are empowered to decide and shape priorities in ways that work for them.

In 1999, the Czech Mother Centres decided to join GROOTS International, a network of grassroots women's organizations, and the Huairou Commission, a coalition of grassroots networks and professional partners. The Czech Mothers' found that their membership in global networks with similar principles and values served to amplify their message and make women feel they are part of a larger struggle beyond their own local neighbourhoods and nations.

In 2001, the Czech Mothers were one of six women's empowerment organizations to participate in the Local to Local Dialogue, a global project developed by the Huairou Commission, in response to the needs of grassroots groups to organize and advance their priorities through dialogues with local government. The Czech Mothers

used this opportunity to initiate and document the process by which the women in a small town called Breznice organized mothers and mobilized the support of schools and local corporations to partner with the municipality to get a playground for their children. The Mother Centres have continued to organize Local to Local Dialogues and are currently in their fourth year of organizing them.

One of the most effective strategies used by the Czech Mother Centres to advance their agenda has been their campaign for a family-friendly society. Launched in 2004, the Family-Friendly Campaign seeks to draw attention to concrete ways in which the government can demonstrate its support to families through city planning around the safety of women and children; flexible jobs; and child-friendly public facilities and services. Most importantly, the Campaign brings grassroots women and their roles as mothers into the public sphere, supporting them to advocate on their own behalf. The Family-Friendly Campaign rewards and recognizes public facilities and businesses that create child-friendly spaces, childcare services, and flexible working conditions for mothers.

## Conclusion

Mothers organizing around child rearing and public support for families with young children, have, by creating a large constituency, reclaimed and reframed issues, thus countering the power of the right wing, conservative forces who thrive on organizing around "respecting and protecting the family" invariably in exclusionary, patriarchal ways. The movement breaks the class and gender biases against women as mothers by creating a critical mass of ordinary women who can articulate and demonstrate the value of their unpaid work. It also creates peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing and empowerment processes that women can manage themselves, while advancing public advocacy campaigns that force governments and the private sector to respond to their priorities. The Mother Centres movement is breaking critical new ground and mobilizing a constituency that traditional feminist movements have largely neglected.

# The Demobilization of Women's Movements: The Case of Palestine

by Islah Jad  
A Summary of the Case Study

## History and Context

It is now eight years since the beginning of the second Palestinian Uprising, or *intifada*, in September, 2000. It has been fifteen years since the creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) following the signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993 between the state of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This agreement ended almost half a century of conflict over the land of Palestine. The first *intifada* which began in 1987 was witness to a vibrant women's movement, which had managed to mobilize large numbers of both urban and rural women to undertake feminist-nationalist projects. However, in the past fifteen years this mass-based movement, which engaged women from grass-roots organizations throughout Palestine to work towards a combined feminist-nationalist agenda, has given way to a process of "NGO-ization". Initiated by members of the leftist political parties, NGO-ization is a term used to denote the process through which issues of collective concern are transformed into isolated projects, without consideration of the economic, social and political factors from which they arise. Given the strong mobilization of urban and rural women of all classes during the first *intifada*, it was shocking for the author to hear women leaders say, in 2002, "We are not organized". Clearly, the nascent state structures in the post-1993 era were ill-equipped to assist in the organization of people's resistance and women's movements. To illustrate the change from the early mass-based women's movement to the phenomenon of NGO-ization, two contrasting women's organizations in Palestine are examined.

## The Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC)

### Organization, Goals and Strategies

Founded in 1978, PFWAC was a powerful women's platform that engaged women's grass-roots organizations. Its agenda was to attain equal rights for women with men in the "public sphere", in terms of wages, job opportunities, education, and political participation. One of the most important ingredients for the success of PFWAC was its ability to link women's strategic interests and practical needs in its range of projects. On the one hand, they tried to provide services women wanted, such as economic independence through paid work, and day care and pre-school services. On the other, the income-generating projects had a stated commitment to group decision-making, and also created a politicized space shared with

other women. Their goal was not charity but organization and mobilization. In addition, PFWAC wanted to increase its mass support and that of its parent party, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). The creation of income-generating projects for women and girls was also motivated by PFWAC's knowledge that in order to recruit village and working-class women, it would have to provide forms of engagement that women's families and communities would find acceptable.

### Achievements and Decline

By 1987, PFWAC was a thriving organization and had established an extensive network of pre-schools and nurseries and employed more than 48 teachers and five directors, serving 1,504 children. PFWAC managed, to a great extent, to construct a group identity and referred to themselves as *binat al-'amal al-nissaei*, Daughters of Women's Action (i.e., PFWAC). They were empowered by their role in the national struggle and by a gender system in

which the leftist secular parties were hegemonic over mass organizations and over culture. Empowered by massive networks, they managed to establish links with women in cities, villages and refugee camps through their well-respected and eloquent leaders and their collective action. In such a climate, women in PFWAC were “overt” in their demands and interests and able to act as a group. They asserted that no liberation for the homeland would be possible without women’s liberation, that women would work side by side with men for national liberation, and that they should receive equal pay for equal work.

However, the decline of popular grass-roots organizations, including PFWAC, started in the early nineties and was related to the decline of “institutional politics” (politics as practiced in political parties or unions), and the inability of the Palestine Authority to deliver on initial expectations. School teachers were not paid, pre-schools were closed, and many other services were terminated. The decline in institutional politics in the DFLP, in particular, was due to an internal split in the party over whether or not they should participate in peace negotiations with Israel. By September 1990, the DFLP and PFWAC had informally split into four organizations. The split reflected a larger polarization within Palestinian society over future directions, women being a part of this process.

### ■ The Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC)

The expansion of PFWAC in the mid-eighties had led to the creation of a sophisticated internal structure. Many specialized offices were established as part of the permanent bureaucracy to administer day-to-day activities. This move unexpectedly resulted in the proliferation of separate, apolitical NGOs. One of these was the Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC), an organization, which was born within the structure of the PFWAC, but which then evolved into an independent centre with NGO status.

### ■ Organization, Goals and Strategies

WCLAC was formally established in 1992 and aimed to bridge the gap between the nationalist and social agenda previously neglected by women’s organizations and activists who subsumed their feminism within nationalism. WCLAC claims to redress this imbalance by adopting a women’s rights approach disconnected from the nationalist struggle, and providing different services and products that aim to transform existing gender relations by working on legislative reform. They also emphasize the need for professionals with specialized skills to push their work forward. It was seen, for instance, when they hired a specialist to give advice on the work of their kindergartens that the school would improve significantly. Furthermore, enhancing the relationship between the centre and both regional Arab and international institutions working for human rights in general and on women’s rights in particular was construed as an important mission.

The mechanisms adopted to realize the organization’s new objectives included workshops in legal literacy, provision of legal advice, counselling, and social and psychological help. WCLAC also embarked on documenting violations against women’s rights, studying the status of women, and disseminating information on legal awareness and gender training for women leaders. It committed itself to cooperating with all centres and institutions working in the fields of legal aid and social, psychological, and health counselling for Palestinian women.

### ■ Achievements

The first years of professionalization led to a steady growth of WCLAC and to the organization’s successes in fundraising; to the provision of valuable services to women in health, education, and legal literacy; and to the spread of more information on the legal status of women and their domestic situations, including domestic violence. However, with professionalization, WCLAC also witnessed a major shift in its mission and priorities. The well-integrated approach to the trio of oppressions (nation, class and gender) aimed at changing women’s situation in society, as well as the direction of the



national movement, as promoted by the initiators of the centre, was reduced to a legalistic approach in which the emphasis was put on the legal understanding of women's oppression.

The eruption of the second *intifada* in September 2000 put the projects of many women's organizations, including WCLAC, on hold. But their work on the gender agenda introduced WCLAC and similar women's NGOs to an important community of donors who look for suitable local actors to implement their agenda in the Middle East. The involvement in "peace process" activities by many NGOs, including WCLAC, allows them to acquire power and legitimacy. But since many of these NGO leaders had little history of involvement in the earlier nationalist struggles or in grassroots work, their legitimacy at home is often compromised.



## Conclusion

This case study explores the inter-relationships and the terms of engagement between two different types of women's organizations: a mass-based women's movement and a newly emergent NGO sector. The "new" discourse, used by the NGO elite, might be interpreted to discredit old forms of organization and a means of co-opting popular organizations. The new NGO discourse has been used to forge a space in the public arena at the expense of the old mass-based organizations. The point here is to question if this purportedly "counter-hegemonic" discourse is deployed to increase or decrease women's social activism and their political power. In the final analysis, any counter-hegemonic discourse must take into account the totality of the historical situation, whether this is an ongoing military Occupation, an impotent Palestinian Authority, weakened political parties, weakened women's organizations, or the growing power of Islamic movements. NGO activism in Palestine does not have the capacity to do this.

## The Piquetera/o Movement of Argentina

by Andrea D'Atri and Celeste Escati

### A Summary of the Case Study

The word *piquetera* or *piquetero* comes from the pickets or protests held by unemployed workers as they demanded work and opposed the rising unemployment rates devastating Argentina during the financial crisis in the 1990s. The Piquetero Movement today consists of various groups and organizations that essentially manage the unemployment subsidies provided by the state, and occasionally carry out joint street mobilizations. Nevertheless, this collection of organizations had an undeniable presence in the streets of Argentina during the late 1990s up until 2004, and their methods of struggle were used as an example by other social sectors and movements. Even though the Piquetero is not a key actor in current struggles, its pioneering methods have been deeply embedded in the tradition of struggle of the working class, student, and other social movements in the country. The development of the Piquetero Movement can be divided into three phases:

#### The Beginning

The Piqueteros Movement began on December 16, 1993, with a popular revolt in the Santiago del Estero province, involving government employees who hadn't been paid their salaries for three months. This phase of the movement was characterized by local protests across the country in response to unpopular government policies that left workers unpaid and unemployed. Citizens responded with mass blockades of important highways, attacks on government property, and fierce street battles against the National Gendarmes sent by the federal government to quash the protests. The Piquetero Movement of this period relied on two methods: the picket, for conducting the struggle, and the assembly—a pure form of direct democracy—for decision making. With a combination of both combative and democratic strategies, participants were able to outline a program of action that would meet their demands.

Although several studies agree that women formed an important part of the movement, and constituted a majority of those who put their bodies on the line in the blockades, there was little recognition of their role. In fact, recognized leaders, even those elected from within the movement, were most often men. However, women were able to incorporate demands relating to their everyday life into the list of grievances of the Piquetero Movement: for example, neighbourhood nursery schools, health care improvements, and tax exemptions for

unemployed families. Some of these women were even elected as spokeswomen by the assemblies to enter into dialogue with authorities, politicians, and local functionaries, thereby becoming figures recognized by the movement as a whole.

#### The Second Phase

In this period the Piquetero Movement went from being an inorganic expression of the protests of state workers and others against the exclusion produced by neo liberal economic policies, to becoming an organized movement made up of territorial groups that came together in different coordinating bodies and political blocks. This “new” Piquetero Movement, present in the country's political and economic centre, emerged from social organizations with a prior history of struggle of their own, such as land takeovers and the formation of small cooperatives and mutual neighbourhood civil associations.

In 1997, unemployed people in the metropolitan area surrounding the national capital, known as the Greater Buenos Aires, blocked highways twenty-three times, while another fifty-four road-blocks were set up in the rest of the country. During this period, unemployed workers began to form their own organizations, giving rise to the first *Movimientos de Trabajadores Desocupados* (MTD), (Unemployed Workers Movements).

The main activities of the MTDs consisted of drawing up and presenting community work projects to local authorities in order to receive subsidies and loans for micro-enterprises, organizing unemployed people in the area, and fighting to obtain government “employment plans” for food, gas, etc.

In 1992, the government of the Buenos Aires province had organized thousands of unemployed workers to implement assistance plans. More than 35,000 women, who came to be known as an “army of *manzanas*” acted as coordinators between the food distribution project of the provincial government and the families who benefited from this aid. Women were chosen because the government felt that women would be more honest and that they would do a better job of making the distribution of resources transparent. This massive *manzanas* network was later capitalized upon by the Piquetero Movement, with women joining the MTDs en masse, as a result of which women achieved a greater degree of visibility during this period. Women were also able to take the struggle against domestic violence into their own hands through the Piquetero Movement. Women would take “persuasive action” against the aggressor by visiting his home to talk to him about why he shouldn’t continue to act this way, about the way his companion suffers, etc. In some cases, when these measures did not produce favorable results, the women would remove the aggressors from their homes by force.

Another internationally recognized phenomenon occurred during this period when, in the face of bankruptcy, factory closings, or factory abandonment by the owners, men and women workers decided to occupy the plants and run them “without a boss”. This phenomenon extended to hundreds of businesses, most of them small or medium-sized, which, in time, became cooperatives. The Zanon workers<sup>1</sup>, who pioneered the “without a boss” method of protest, became an example to imitate in other factories that were taken over. They decided to incorporate more workers into the plant and that the new workers should be members of the MTDs. In this way, they established an alliance

with the piquetero movement that allowed the latter, in turn, to come to their defense in case of legal efforts to evict them from the factories or if the police or union bureaucracy attacked them. These workers showed that they were capable of resolving the problem of lack of work, and that unfair business interests were solely responsible for their being unpaid or unemployed.

## The *Piquetero* Movement Today

During the past few years there has been notable growth in the Argentine economy, primarily based on the international price of raw materials. This economic growth has lowered unemployment rates and considerably raised consumption levels, primarily benefiting the upper and middle classes. The government was also able to increase tax revenues, which in turn strengthened its policy of subsidies, incentives, and credits for the sectors of the Piquetero Movement that were willing to abandon the struggle in the streets. Through repression, at first, and then through cooptation, the government was able to fragment, dismember, and demobilize the Piquetero Movement. Only a small minority of the piquetero organizations continue to confront the government and the regime’s institutions.

Nevertheless, the experiences of struggle against unemployment and dire poverty have served as an example to millions of workers who witnessed the loss of employment opportunities during the implementation of neo liberal policies in Argentina. They also represent a tradition of struggle that will be renewed by the working class in the case of possible economic crisis in the future. For thousands of women, this experience has marked their entry into public life and the transformation of their everyday domestic lives. However, it remains to be seen how the sacrifices made by these women will impact future generations of girls raised by these mothers who “put their bodies on the line” in road-blocks, unintentionally confronting ancestral models and stereotypes.

1. Zanon Ceramics was one of South America’s largest producers of ceramics and *porcellanato* floors located in the Neuquén Province of Argentina

## GROOTS Kenya by Awino Okech

### A Summary of the Case Study

Founded in 1995, GROOTS Kenya emerged from the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women held in Beijing, China. It provides a lens through which we can examine the question of what a cohesive women's movement might be in Kenya. However, what differentiates GROOTS Kenya from the others is that it names itself as a movement and not as a network or NGO, which other groups with similar approaches do.

#### Organisation Structure

GROOTS Kenya can perhaps be best described as a network of over 500 self-help groups who consistently move in and out of its operating space depending on their needs. GROOTS Kenya is structured around a secretariat located in Nairobi. This acts as a quasi-infrastructure base from which all the regions link through projects or support structures. There is also a Board, whose role is to give strategic direction to their work. Annually, all regional members come together at a retreat, where they share with each other their challenges, experiences and opportunities on the ground and their vision for the following year. The regional groups consistently inform the strategic direction of the organization, and their involvement is multi-faceted. In addition, through regional focal point leaders, mentorship and direction is provided to the sub groups, so that there is regular consultation and inflow of information from focal point leaders, to the secretariat and back to the various groups in the region.

#### Strategies and Achievements

GROOTS Kenya works within four thematic areas:

- **Community Responses to HIV and AIDS:** The advocacy and programmatic activities involve supporting communities through training and capacity building of women. This has invariably led to supporting orphans;
- **Community Resources and Livelihood:** Through this program, communities are led through processes of analysing and mobilising local resources;
- **Women and Property Programme:** This is GROOTS Kenya's flagship programme. The emphasis in this programme is on safeguarding property rights of women and orphans;
- **Women Leadership and Governance:** Through this programme they aim to encourage grassroots women leaders in helping them share their skills and hold those in government accountable.

Organising in GROOTS Kenya is largely centred on strategic interventions in selected advocacy settings, although most of their work is done at the grassroots level. The grassroots work has not adopted protest-oriented action as a key mechanism to achieving their goals but rather, emphasis has been laid on lobbying and advocacy.

GROOTS Kenya's biggest strategic alliance has been its membership in the global network of GROOTS International. This has created space for their entry into the international world. They often partner with GROOTS International to conduct international advocacy. At an international level, they are known as an organization that takes grassroots women abroad. GROOTS Kenya has been one of the lead organizations pushing for a change in Africa from traditional NGO organizing towards having grassroots women at the forefront of advocacy, with NGOs providing back up support. They are also entering into a partnership with UNDP and GROOTS International, to create innovative audit systems that ensure that the contribution of grassroots women is accounted for financially, i.e., putting a dollar value on their volunteer work. The fact that GROOTS Kenya has been able to send grassroots women to international conferences—such as UN Habitat or WSSD+10 - has changed wider perceptions about grassroots women and

their capacity to contribute to local, national and global debates.

GROOTS Kenya hesitates to label itself as a “feminist organisation” since international concepts such as feminism are not well internalised in African society. Moreover, there exists no clear definition of feminism, as feminist agendas are diverse and extensive. Nonetheless, most feminists would concur that their activism, research and praxis is driven by the general insight that the nature of women’s experiences as individuals and as social beings, their contributions to work, culture and knowledge, have been systematically ignored or misrepresented by mainstream discourses in different areas. If this was to be taken as a broad working definition, there are ways in which the agenda, strategies and ethos adopted by GROOTS Kenya in its approach to grassroots solidarity building could certainly be considered feminist.

In actual fact, GROOTS Kenya sees itself first and foremost as a community development organization, reinforced by the fact that most of the organizations they have closely worked with are not institutions that would be viewed in Kenya as gender oriented or feminist in nature. GROOTS Kenya has been unable to detach itself from being a service delivery organisation. Its “practical needs” approach is in response to its constituency—groups in rural and peri-urban settings who have not benefited from the gains of development and who suffer from a lack of access to resources. Nonetheless, GROOTS Kenya has also advanced its constituency’s strategic interests by ensuring that they are critical to shaping and influencing change in these areas.



## Conclusion

In exploring GROOTS Kenya within the context of movements, it is clear that it initially emerged as an NGO. Its inception was not based on collective thinking amongst the groups that now form part of its “membership”. Nevertheless, if we apply the framework of New Movements theory, GROOTS Kenya *has* built a movement since it has enabled grassroots women to build a new identity, through

access to hitherto non-existent leadership opportunities, or visibility at local and international forums where their voices were largely absent.

In the Kenyan context, the seemingly fragmented nature of women’s organising often beguiles people into thinking a women’s movement is non-existent. If indeed there is no women’s movement in Kenya, how do we qualify the numerous voices located around the country—such as GROOTS Kenya - that organise sporadically around women’s rights issues? However, if women’s rights activism in Kenya is to move to the next level, then there is a need for concerted efforts towards building coalitions and national alliances around sustaining ideas.

But the politics of exclusion and inclusion generally, and due to geography specifically, continue to be a problem that causes major rifts in what could otherwise be a coherent women’s movement in Kenya. For this reason, there are many ways in which the work that GROOTS Kenya is doing is laudable, in terms of its efforts at building a grassroots based movement that spans geographical and ethnic divides of Kenya.

# The European Romani Women's Movement— International Roma Women's Network

by Rita Izsak  
A Summary of the Case Study

## Situation and Context

Romani<sup>1</sup> women throughout Europe continue to face various forms of discrimination in their everyday lives. They face discrimination based not only on their ethnicity but on their gender as well. There is a dire lack of access to education and healthcare and women are expected primarily to be caretakers of the household. Girls are often forced into early and arranged marriages, and subjected to virginity tests. Women face domestic violence and the danger of being forced into prostitution. There is an urgent need for targeted policies and strategies to remedy the situation of extreme vulnerability that Romani women are living with on a daily basis. This case study discusses the efforts of two major Roma women's organizations to tackle the oppression, exploitation and discrimination faced by Romani women throughout Europe.

## The International Romani Women's Network (IRWN): Organisation and Structure

The idea of creating an international Romani women's network first arose in November 2002 when several Romani and non-Romani women from approximately twenty European countries came together in Vienna. The conference was held to discuss access to healthcare in Roma communities, with special emphasis on Romani women. The participants then decided to create an international Romani women's network and IRWN was officially launched on March 8th, 2003, on International Women's day, to demonstrate the organization's commitment to women's rights. It has members from each Romani community; Roma, Sinti, Gypsies and Travellers, and from 18 European countries, making IRWN the first and only international umbrella organization representing Romani women of *all* Romani groups from most countries of Europe.

## Goals and Strategies

The objectives of IRWN, as outlined in their statute, are the following:

- To improve the overall situation of Roma women and lobby governments in Europe towards the same end;
- To challenge individual and institutional discrimination at all levels, more specifically discrimination in housing, healthcare, education and employment;
- To give visibility to Roma women, and to articulate their agenda and to attain basic human rights;
- To ensure that our culture is recognized, respected, and resourced;
- To partner with governments to solve issues faced by Roma women and to garner support from international organizations and institutions.

1. Editor's note: The Roma—popularly called “Gypsies” in derogatory terms—are one of the oldest diaspora communities in the world, having migrated to Europe from the north-western part of India in the 11th century A.D. and onwards. They are a distinct racial and ethnic minority, whose numbers are estimated to be currently 7–9 million, the majority of whom live in Eastern Europe and Russia. For hundreds of years, they were itinerant, though now they are largely settled communities living mainly in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Despite their long-standing location there, they resisted cultural assimilation, maintaining the language and traditions they brought with them, including a rigid patriarchal structure more similar to that of the Indian subcontinent than of Europe.

IRWN uses various strategies that help them work towards achieving these goals. These include: (i) fact-finding missions intended to monitor the human rights situation faced by Roma women; (ii) a detailed database on these women; (iii) information on international and domestic legislation and case law; and (iv) using all available legal means to assist Roma women.

## Achievements and Challenges

One of IRWN's most visible achievements is the regular communication and news-sharing facilitated through its list-serve. Although there are no yearly average statistics available, between March and September 2007 alone, 120 information e-mails were sent out to 170 subscribers. From the time of its formation, IRWN has participated in lobbying efforts at various levels and as a result, is now a founding member of the first democratically elected international Roma entity, the European Roma and Traveller Forum (ERTF). It is also a member of the European Women's Lobby, where it has one delegate in the General Assembly. These membership opportunities were achieved through personal contacts and individual lobbying efforts undertaken by IRWN members.

Even though it has been five years since its inception, IRWN continues to face major challenges. The organization has no office, no paid staff, no website, and for some years had no funding at all. This is why IRWN undertakes very few activities on its own, and has to depend on the information and activities gathered by / of its members. Due to the lack of funding, IRWN has been unable to set up a work plan or strategy for its operations, and cannot articulate its own distinct vision or strategies for achieving its objectives.

## The Joint Roma Women Initiative (JRWI) of the Open Society Institute

This Initiative was launched in 1999 by the Network Women's Programme (NWP) initiative of the Open Society Institute (OSI), which promotes the

advancement of women's human rights, gender equality, and empowerment as an integral part of the process of democratization. JRWI focuses on policy development, the integration of women's perspectives into the main Romani movement and works to create links between Roma women and mainstream women's rights movements.

One of JRWI's main achievements is the creation of a database of Romani women activists who work to promote the rights of Roma women. In addition, it has run numerous trainings and workshops, as well as a virginity project conducted in seven countries aimed at promoting freedom of choice and gender equality. JRWI also launched a project in 2006 in 11 European countries to enhance the grassroots networking of Roma women.

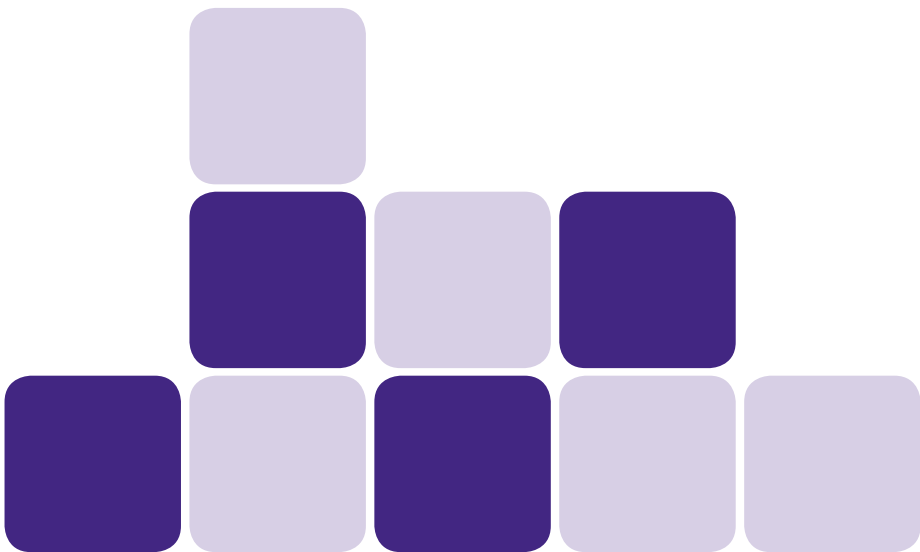
One of the most laudable achievements of both IRWN and JWRI is the joint statement they issued in May 2006, endorsed by 26 Romani women from 10 different countries. This was the first time that Roma women from different countries, backgrounds, groups and ages managed to make a distinction regarding what is part of Romani culture, and what is a characteristic of more widespread patriarchal traditions that Roma, and other women, have to fight against. The joint women's statement was a milestone in that it challenged the thinking of Romani women themselves.

## Conclusion

In building a movement one has to start by building local and national networks. However, in the field of Roma rights, the fact is that many organizations formed as a result of available funds from large international donors and do not have a firm base at the grassroots or community level. If IRWN and JRWI had the support of donor organizations to dialogue and come up with a concrete action plan for the upcoming years, this would enable them to actually start building a movement. These two initiatives can reach out to Roma communities wherever they may be and this unique potential should be used to influence European and national policies that target or affect Romani women.

## CHAPTER 3

LESSONS TO LEARN:  
INSIGHTS FROM THE WOMEN'S  
MOVEMENTS CASE STUDIES







## Chapter 3: Lessons to Learn

### Insights from the Women's Movements Case Studies

There is a wealth of information, insight, and learning in the fourteen case studies of women's movements around the world presented in this volume. They represent a huge diversity in terms of their political and social contexts, the issues, interests and exclusions that triggered their formation, the methods used to mobilize and build the movements, the strategies they use to advance their cause, the multiplicity of targets they engage, the challenges and setbacks they face, and the extraordinary range of their achievements. While readily acknowledging that no synthesis can possibly do justice to this diversity and richness, this chapter attempts to systematize the lessons these movements teach us, and to distill the key messages they are sending us to inform our thinking and action with respect to building movements.

#### Historical and Political Contexts

The greatest diversity among our case studies is the range of socio-political and historical contexts in which they have arisen. The various movements and their political contexts could be categorized as follows:

- Post-colonial states with neo-liberal democracies (India, Kenya, South Africa, the Philippines);
- Post-communist states with neo-liberal democracies (Czech Republic, East and Central Europe);
- Neoliberal democracies (USA, Mexico);
- Neoliberal democracies with secessionist struggles (Mexico);
- Post-dictatorship states with neo-liberal democracies (Argentina);
- Post-revolutionary theocratic states (Iran);
- Occupied states with struggles for political autonomy (Palestine); and
- States in conflict or civil war (Sudan).

Some cases, such as the disabled women's movement, have emerged in the global space, with roots in multiple national political and social contexts, but with the similarity of exclusion propelling them to organize themselves both locally and globally. And similarly, the sex workers and lesbian women's movement case studies may pertain to a particular political context, but have strong influences or links with regional or global movements of isolated or excluded constituencies.

The fact that these women's movements have arisen in such widely differing contexts suggests that our theories about "enabling" and "disabling" conditions for movement building need to be reconsidered. For instance, the movements in Palestine, Iran, Argentina, Sudan and Mexico were built amidst the most disabling conditions imaginable: the occupation by Israel and daily violence and conflict; repression by the theocratic Iranian regime, profoundly suspicious of and hostile to even the most basic of women's rights; the chaos following the economic meltdown in Argentina; the decades-long civil war, gendered violence and disruption of life in the Sudan; and an armed secessionist struggle violently and militarily suppressed by successive Mexican governments blind to the cultural hegemony and racism of its policies towards indigenous people. So clearly, strong women's movements are not only possible, but could even be a response to hostile conditions that affect not only women themselves, but their families and communities.

Another widely-held belief challenged by these movement's stories is the necessity of liberal democracy, or rather, a "democratic space," for popular organizing to occur. Indeed, the Czech, Sudan and Iranian

cases show that women have found ingenious and subversive ways of mobilizing even when that space is limited or absent. Since the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iranian women have not had a legitimate, legally ensured democratic space to organize or protest against the inexorable rolling back of their rights. Therefore, they formed a highly decentralized, headless movement that works both under and above ground. Women meet in private homes or under the guise of religious meetings; the cells of organized women are widely dispersed in both rural and urban areas across the country; and the movement is not led by one particular set of high-profile leaders whose detention can weaken the movement. All of this makes it virtually impossible for the regime to successfully repress or destroy this resilient struggle.

The Czech women began their organizing as mothers of young children at a time when indeed, public meetings of even five people were against the law; and even after the Velvet Revolution, the post-Soviet Czech state viewed their activities with suspicion, since the whole idea of civil society and popular organizing were still viewed as threats. They were also victims of the pro-natalist policies of both the Soviet and post-Soviet Czech state, which glorified motherhood to fight declining birth rates. They rewarded mothers of young children for doing the isolating work of full-time home-based childcare, and penalized them for wanting to be fully engaged citizens organized to intervene in urban planning and local and national policy as a collective force. It has taken over a decade of organized resistance and advocacy, and the subversive power of international recognition for the movement's leadership, to break through these barriers. The hangovers of the Soviet bloc's suspicion of civil society organizing still persist in many forms.

The SuWEP women's peace movement in Sudan had its origins outside the country altogether—in the gathering of refugee women in neighboring states like Kenya—but quickly permeated into the home country. Despite the horrific conditions of socio-economic breakdown and relentless armed conflict, SuWEP found ways of building bridges across women of the North and South, of building trust between women despite bitter experiences of violence and personal loss. Eventually, they were able to build a movement where its women seized leadership of a complex process of advancing a culture of peace and negotiation that directly challenged the pervasive culture of war and militarism.

The post-colonial democratic contexts of India, South Africa, the Philippines, and Kenya, though, did not require this kind of subterranean organizing. These countries had enabling legal and constitutional frameworks for the formation of NGOs and popular movements, but these movements faced other forms of resistance: debilitating levels of poverty combined with economic policies that made the opportunity cost of participation in movements quite high; persistent and exclusionary social power structures such as rigid patriarchy and caste (in the case of the Dalit women in India), and both male and upper-class attitudes that oppressed women (such as male-privileging sexual relations leading to high levels of HIV and AIDS infections among women in Kenya or violence against lesbian women in South Africa), and excluded their priorities and voices from policy processes (which is what GROOTS Kenya and the One in Nine Campaign has worked to reverse). In the case of Kenya, long periods of authoritarian single-party rule created quasi-dictatorships that negated its democratic constitution. The progressive legislation on the books in India and South Africa was equally unable to break the customary feudal power structures that continued to dominate historically oppressed castes, particular in rural areas.

The post-Apartheid neo-liberal democracy of South Africa is a unique case. At the birth of the "New South Africa" there was worldwide celebration of the far-reaching gender equality reforms initiated by the new regime—quotas for women in parliament, gender budgets, an empowered women's commission with veto powers over all public policy, etc. But these early promises have been betrayed at many levels. Neo-liberal economics has impoverished the vast majority of people, basic services and subsidies have been drastically reduced, the HIV and AIDS pandemic has devastated the society and the economy, and sexual violence against women and girls, particularly, has grown unchecked. The One in Nine Campaign was triggered by the rape charge against a leading South African politician from the ruling party, but consolidated around the apathy of the government machinery in handling violence against lesbian and other women. The vast majority of the founders of this movement are poor black women facing the multiple disadvantages of poverty, gender, sexual orientation, and violence in an increasingly threatening social environment.

The Palestinian women's situation is even more complex: while they enjoyed a large degree of civic space under the first Intifada and the Palestinian Authority, as citizens of an occupied territory, they have worked under almost continuous conditions of conflict and economic strife. Their movement has suffered from the NGO-ization that the liberal Palestinian Authority facilitated. The NGO-ization is also the unwitting result of the socio-economic conditions of women and children, on the one hand, and the loss of the progressive feminist movement's mass base to the Islamist agenda on the other. So women's organizations deliver services and engage in more western modes of rights advocacy, disconnected from any political mass movement. This benefits the Islamist forces, who take large numbers of women away from this imported feminist agenda with their more popular and militant stand against negotiations with Israel and its occupation of their territory. After the failure of the Palestinian Authority, and the launch of the Second Intifada, the Islamists have created a space for women's political participation that the NGO-ized progressive feminist movement has failed to provide. The large numbers of grassroots women who have fled to support the Islamists are not yet aware of their instrumentalization by an agenda that will ultimately erode their rights and equality (something the Iranian women know only too well).

Three of the four case studies added to this second edition of *Changing Their World* represent another critical dimension of women's movement building histories and contexts: the particular nature of exclusion faced by certain women by virtue of their sexual orientation, their occupation in sex work, or their level of ability. These stories highlight how mainstream women's or other progressive social movements themselves have been exclusionary towards these constituencies, either consciously or unconsciously, because they don't fit some invisible but very pervasive norm. These case studies tell the story of women organizing—or being organized—because they cannot find space or voice within their own male-dominated movements (disabled women), or within women's movements, sometimes because of insensitivity or tokenism (disabled women), sometimes because of genuine political ambivalence on their issues (sex workers), and sometimes because they fall outside the class norm of the mainstream movement (lesbians who are poor).

## Strategic Insights

Our case studies generate some significant insights about the power and character of women's movements, and the strategies used to build their movements.

- **Women build movements around particular identities and interests.** These movements were launched by women not essentially around their identity as women, but as women of *particular identities, categories and circumstances*, such as women of particular ethnicities / social groups (Roma women, Dalit women, indigenous women); women facing particular forms of exclusion or voicelessness (sex workers, disabled women, lesbian women, mothers of young children, poor grassroots women), in particular occupations or economic situations (domestic workers, *piqueteras*, sex work), or in particular political circumstances (Iranian women, Sudanese women, Palestinian women). In the words of Esther, a Zapatista woman, "*I'm indigenous and I'm a woman, and that's all that matters right now*" (López Cruz 24).
- Our case histories demonstrate that the power of movements—and particularly of women's movements—lies in the fact that their constituents / members have become **primary agents of change**. I want to contrast this with the notion of "agency" which is popular in both feminist and development rhetoric, because while even an effective feminist NGO will enable women to use their agency, they may not, consciously or unconsciously, actively move women of their constituency into primary leadership. The leadership that is built at the base is often secondary to the leadership of the NGO or support organization. But many of our cases—the movements of the domestic workers, sex workers, disabled women, *piqueteras*, indigenous women, Sudanese women, violence survivors,

Kenyan grassroots women, and Czech mothers—are replete with examples of **primary agency**, symbolized best, perhaps, by these words from Celia Martinez, a Piqueteras leader:

*“In other times I would never have dreamed of being so far from home and fighting for demands that I believe are just.... Trying to tell people about the struggle of my factory and my people, well...these things...I’d never have seen myself doing this. I’m sure I always had the ability hidden away and that it was part of me, but I had never developed it”* (cited in D’Afri and Escati, 4).

- Some movements are more explicitly feminist than others, and this is something worth unpacking. Why do some movements openly adopt the ideology and label of feminism, while others hesitate to do so, even when they are mobilizing isolated, marginalized or excluded women to gain visibility, voice, power, influence? GROOTS Kenya, Domestic Workers, and Czech Mothers are either hesitant to call themselves feminist or have possibly felt distanced from feminist movements by specific encounters or experiences<sup>1</sup>. This forces us to question how feminism has become positioned in a way that is exclusionary, even in the eyes of women with an implicitly feminist agenda. This is not entirely because of the attitudes of some feminist groups who take it upon themselves to define what is and is not feminist in terms of issues or strategies; it is also the result of the stereotypes and biases about feminism that have been constructed by forces like the media. Whatever the cause, this situation indicates that we need to re-engage organizations and movements who are working for women’s rights and support them to embrace the identity, ideology and politics of feminism, and radicalize their agenda in the process. The Czech Mothers, for instance, don’t appear to have as yet challenged the gendered nature of child care responsibilities, but must be supported to do so without disclaiming or surrendering their role and rights as mothers. They have, so far, considered the needs of heteronormative families in their “family friendly” cities campaigns, but might move, gradually, to include other types of families. So they might be willing to adapt their agenda in several ways if they don’t start out feeling defensive, fearing that feminists would *a priori* reject or denigrate their focus on motherhood and child care, for which, in an earlier era, feminists demanded recognition, respect, and economic value.
- In several ways, our movements are reclaiming and reframing feminism—sometimes from urban middle class feminist issues, sometimes from the western model of individual liberation, and sometimes from the instrumentalist approaches of men’s movements. The indigenous women have created, for instance, an analysis that asserts their unique culture and the power of their relationships with land and natural resources, while simultaneously challenging not only their culturally-rooted oppression but the dominance of mainstream culture and government policies. Roma Women (East Europe) are struggling to do the same. Domestic Workers (USA) are creating new links between their status as immigrants and a critical but exploited workforce with their status as marginalized women in need of accessible health and reproductive services and child care responsibilities. The One in Nine Campaign (South Africa) is seeking to establish a new conceptual frame that locates sexuality at the core of women’s struggles for justice and freedom from violence.
- In other ways, some of our movements are actually exploding and advancing the traditional political and conceptual boundaries of feminism in radical new ways. While much of early feminist theorization was based on challenging the patriarchal notion of anatomy as destiny, disability theorists and the disabled women’s movement has interrogated ideas of “bodily integrity” that lay unquestioned at the heart of feminist theory and practice for decades. They have shown us how feminism itself assumed certain norms of “embodiedness”, about what constitutes ability and bodily integrity, and

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1. The late Monika Jaekel, one of the founders of the German Mothers Centers, told the author in an interview conducted in 2003 that despite repeated efforts, they failed to find a legitimate space and recognition for the participation of the mothers centers movement within the German Feminist movement .

about the very transient and problematic nature of our understanding of physical or mental wholeness and ability. The queer movement has forced us to interrogate the traditional male-female gender binary that was so central to feminist analysis, challenged the notion of the social construction of gender into two simple categories, and demonstrated that gender identity lies along an infinite and complex continuum, with huge variation. Sex workers' movements challenge us to question our own internalization of ideas about the universal sanctity of certain parts of the female body, arguing that this notion in fact arises from patriarchal controls of female sexuality. While most sex workers' movements have stood firmly against forced trafficking of women and girls into sex work, they simultaneously assert the right of women to choose to be in sex work. They contest the notion that trading sex for money is morally on a different plane from performing any other kind of service for a fee. They compel us to address their demand for recognition of sex work as work, and their rights as workers, moving the debate away from moral positions and into the realm of rights.

- What is emerging, therefore, is a far more complex feminist analysis and theory that shows the intersecting nature of women's practical needs and strategic interests, and the ability to act on this understanding in powerful new ways. Some movements have used mainstream development interventions and services—such as self-help groups, home-based care, or managing subsidies—as the base for movement building, and appear to be successfully going beyond the usual limits of these activities to create political consciousness and a longer-term political agenda. The self help member groups of GROOTS Kenya, for instance, have emerged as key challengers to local power structures, claiming inheritance rights for widows and orphans from customary tribunals, running for local elections, and ensuring local governance is responsive to their priorities and agenda. Another good example of this more sophisticated approach is the way the Indigenous Women (Mexico) have remained within the larger movement for indigenous rights, while consistently challenging patriarchal reconstructions by male leaders of supposedly traditional gender relations. So is the way the Sudanese Women's Peace Movement (Sudan/Northeast Africa) demonstrated that peace and a culture of peace was essential both for meeting their practical needs and advancing their gender interests; and the way Domestic Workers (USA) reached out to a range of unlikely but similarly marginalized groups in their local mobilizations, in order to build a wider base of support and build greater political clout for their advocacy.
- Some movements are therefore very strategic about how and when to claim an autonomous identity—e.g. the Indigenous Women (Mexico), Dalit Mahila Samiti (India), Piqueteras (Argentina), and Disabled Women (Global)—and when to ally or embed their agendas within other movements. This is a particular kind of political strategy, which recognizes that the political agenda of the larger movement is critical to their own rights, and which seeks to avoid splintering movements in a way that could be exploited by the regimes and power structures they are challenging—we could easily imagine, for instance, how the Mexican government could seek to concede the demands of the Indigenous Women (Mexico), but not of the indigenous movement at large. So, as the Indigenous Women's National Coordinating Committee recognizes,

*"We women say that autonomy for indigenous peoples is the path towards initiating a new relationship among ourselves, to the Mexican government, to other Mexican people, and between men and women..."*  
(Carlesen cited. López Cruz).

- On the other hand, retaining these dual identities—as women, and as part of another excluded and marginalized group—has proved challenging for some. Disabled women's particular and unique concerns, for instance, have fallen between two stools, with the disabled people's movement assuming their particular needs and interests as women will be dealt with by women's movements, and women's movements assuming that their needs and interests as people with disabilities will be handled by the disability movement. But this has resulted in neither movements addressing these women's specific issues, as Umoh E., Founder Director of the Nigerian NGO Family Centered Initiative for Challenged Persons puts it:



## LESSONS TO LEARN

*“The issue of women with disabilities is excluded in two areas; there is a great oversight of disabled women’s issues within the women’s movement, they think it is a matter for disability movement, while the disability movement think it is a matter for the women’s movement. So, we are at a crossroad and sometimes I am almost tempted to think that we are beginning to lose our gender because of a disability” (Price, 5).*

- There is a very strong emphasis, in several of our movements, on building leadership, and especially on *new* (not necessarily young) leadership. The Domestic Workers (USA) have taken this to the most sophisticated level by building leadership training into their governance model, and ensuring the development of new leaders. But leadership building to strengthen and sustain their movements is a key concern and practice in several others—Indigenous Women (Mexico), Dalit Mahila Samiti (India), Piqueteras (Argentina), One in Nine Campaign (South Africa).
- The role of struggle as the best school for leadership and political consciousness is firmly attested by several of our movements—an achievement that cannot be claimed by the training programs offered by even the best feminist NGOs. The clarity, courage, and strategic insight of the those involved in Indigenous Women (Mexico), Piqueteras (Argentina), Domestic Workers (USA), Sex Workers (South-west India), and Dalit Mahila Samiti (India), would be hard to equal.
- Our case studies also teach us that we must define the “radical” nature of political agendas and activism within the socio-political context in which movements have evolved, and not against some absolute ideological standards. The framing of issues by the Czech Mothers (Czech Republic), for instance, could appear rather conventional (namely, centered around the isolating process of nuclear-family motherhood and child-rearing) if we fail to recognize that their organizing began in the Soviet era. This was a time when public gatherings and civic action were dangerous, and that the women who founded the movement were forced to meet on street corners to discuss their concerns—they were thus acting very radically. Their mobilization of other women and the resources to start mothers centers, in a region where neither men nor women had the privilege of acting independently in their own interest, was not only radical but a shrewd use of the space that the Velvet Revolution opened up. Similarly, the initial demands of the sex workers’ movement not to be ignored by HIV and AIDS prevention programs, as though they were completely dispensable, could be viewed as a narrow attempt to get access to health services. But this was in fact a profoundly radical challenge to the dominant discourse and positioning of sex workers as disease vectors, and led to the formation of a movement that has transformed the attitudes and practices of a wide range of actors, including feminists and feminist movements.
- The framing of political agendas by these movements is also a fascinating process. In some movements, the evolution is from one or two gendered interests / issues (home-based care for the ill, collective spaces for mothers, recognition of domestic work as labor, removal of caste-based discrimination, access to health services, or inclusion in peace negotiations) to a more complex and intersectional analysis. As Klara Rulikova, a leader of the Czech Mothers Centers puts it,

*“...With the mothers center, we did not think about how we were trying to change society, it was simply about being together with others like myself” (Gupta, 3).*

In other cases, the agenda and the analysis underlying it quickly assumes complexity (OINC, IW, VAMP), even if collective action is focused on particular struggles. The Roma Women (East Europe), however, demonstrates the contestation between older and younger activists, and different Roma women’s formations (IRWN and JRWI) over the framing of the agenda, and intense but respectful negotiations between the two to create a more feminist agenda. Overall, the movements also demonstrate, much more so than male-dominated movements, a concern for building broader, more inclusive agendas that integrate the interests, often, of a wider range of communities.

## ■ Factors Inhibiting or Constraining Movements

Among the factors that have hindered the formation and development of movements, the following are the most significant.

1. NGO-ization and a narrow issue or service focus without broader political understanding or analysis. The Roma Women (East Europe) the Palestinian Women's Movement (Palestine), and the Domestic Workers (USA) cases all highlight the de-politicization that can happen as a result of an NGO-based agenda, which becomes more pre-occupied with the delivery of services, organizational survival concerns that are disconnected from movement-building, and an increasingly top-down approach. As the Domestic Workers case study points out,

*"non-profit organizations ... resisted a deep analysis of the political economic system that they were fighting to change, organizing groups were narrowly focused on issue-specific campaigns, rarely making connections with one another across communities and issue areas"* (Mercado and Poo, 3).

2. Movements built from above, with little or no organized base—something that some parts of the Roma Women (East Europe) have attempted to correct. This is a classic case of when a group of organizations form a coalition and assert themselves as a movement (IRWN), but without the mobilization of the grassroots women they claim to represent, and the lack of focus on political consciousness and empowerment on the ground.
3. Certain donor policies and approaches have also disabled some aspects of movement-building and strengthening activities: for instance, the National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women in Mexico has faced obstacles in resourcing its members' demands for training in political participation because donors they contacted wouldn't fund this without a hand in designing and running the courses. This is another way in which powerful external institutions can obstruct or derail movement agendas.
4. In the case of the Piqueteras (Argentina), although the case study cites co-optation and repression as the primary reasons for the break up of their movement, one wonders whether it was also partly because they aligned themselves too strongly with political parties. This alignment which instrumentalized them and they lost interest in their issues once the parties were able to change the regime, and gained access to formal political power. From being a strong, mass-based movement, the Piqueteras became clients of trade unions and their patron political parties, and were reduced to groups that doled out unemployment subsidies.





### Origin Stories: How they begin

The birth stories of the movements in our cases seem to fall into several overlapping categories, which are presented below.

Figure 1: How and Why They Began

Born out of	Movements	Catalyst or catalytic spaces
<b>Movement building by feminist / women’s organizations’</b>	Dalit Mahila Samiti	Vanangana
	Kenyan grassroots women	GROOTS Kenya
	Sex Workers	AIDS programs that focused on sex workers as disease vectors, not subjects with rights
<b>Specific political situations, moments, events</b>	Indigenous Women	Dialogue between Zapatistas and federal govt. of Mexico, resulting in the San Andrés Accords (1996)
	Piqueteras	Waning of the piquetero movement
	GALANG	Upper-class and male-dominated LGBT movement
	Iranian Women	Betrayal of their interests by the theocratic regime
<b>Strategic spaces (international or other meetings or conferences)</b>	Palestinian Women	Israeli occupation Palestinian liberation struggle
	Domestic Workers	Beijing US Social Forum
<b>Crises</b>	OINC	Zuma trial; Killing of lesbian activists
	Piqueteras	Economic collapse in Argentina Low morale of male activists
	SuWEP	Sudan Civil war and displacement / dislocation of women’s lives
<b>Other movements or local movements coalescing</b>	Indigenous Women	Zapatista movement; Mexican Indigenous People’s movement
	Domestic Workers	Local domestic worker unions / associations Male-dominated national and global disabled people’s movements
	Disabled Women	
<b>Programs or interventions that morph into movements</b>	Czech Mothers	Setting up of mothers centers
	GROOTS Kenya	Home-based care for HIV and AIDS patients Exclusion from HIV and AIDS prevention services
	VAMP (Sex Workers)	

## ■ Stages of Movement Growth and Maturity

The case studies also show that movements have a distinct evolutionary path, and can be placed along a continuum—or, in some cases, a spiral—of growth and maturity, which includes decay and decline. Some of our movements are in the making, some are emerging into full-blown movement form, and some are mature movements. And at least one, the Piqueteras (Argentina), has declined and decayed. Sometimes, movements grow in dramatic leaps, in both scope and scale. As the Czech Mothers case study says, for example,

*“In the last fifteen years, these women have gone from creating one mother center in Prague; to organizing and managing over 250 mother centers ... to federating a country-wide network of women who work collectively on a broader set of values and goals that demonstrate why and how Czech society must become ‘family friendly’” (Gupta 1).*

As we emphasized in the introductory chapter, movements and organizations do not necessarily evolve in a linear or sequential way—they often go “two steps forward, one step back” as the saying goes, or cycle back and forth between dormancy and activity, between expansion and contraction. Nevertheless, it is useful to unpack and analyze the characteristics that movements exhibit at different stages or levels of their evolution. Specifically,

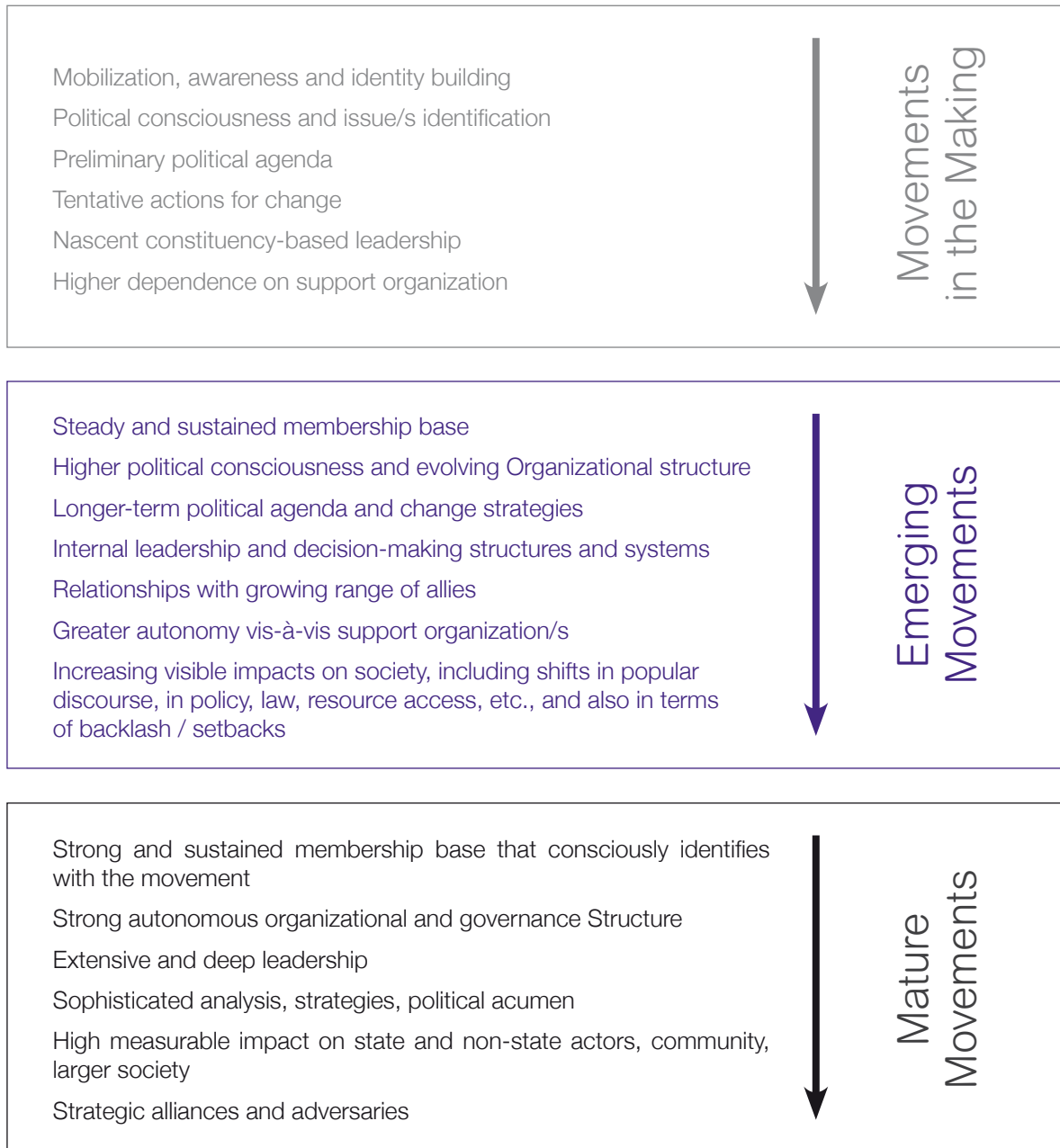
- Some movements exhibit a high level of maturity—i.e., have an in-depth analysis, a well-articulated political agenda, a highly organized mass base, well-developed organizational and decision-making structures, processes for building and renewing leadership, and have clearly delineated relationships (in terms of strategic and other decision-making) with allies and support NGOs that work with them. They have developed complex strategies, alliances and relationships, and have earned growing recognition from governments, other movements, and the public.
- Some are emerging movements—they have achieved a moderate level of mobilization and collective power, an increasingly clear political agenda, and autonomous leadership structures, but are yet to achieve sustainability, political or policy impact, or changes in public perceptions of their issues or in the larger discourse.
- Others are at a more nascent stage of movement formation, and need continued support to sharpen their politics and agenda, expand their constituency base, and sharpen strategies.

These movement stages suggest a maturity continuum that is presented in Figure 2 on page 72. The use of the term maturity is also not meant to suggest that earlier stages of movement formation constitute immaturity. We recognize that in practice, movements may not fall neatly along this continuum—they may have some characteristics from different phases in different combinations. Nevertheless, we present these stages as distinct because they have proved useful<sup>2</sup> in providing movement-building organizations and movements a trajectory along which to place themselves, and a useful tool to help assess where their movements are, and how to take them to the next stage of development so that they can achieve greater political impact.

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2. The author has used this continuum in a number of movement building training institutes and participants have consistently sent feedback that it has been enormously useful to them in assessing the level of development of their movements, and in highlighting strategic directions for their organizations.

Figure 2: Continuum of Movement Development and Maturity

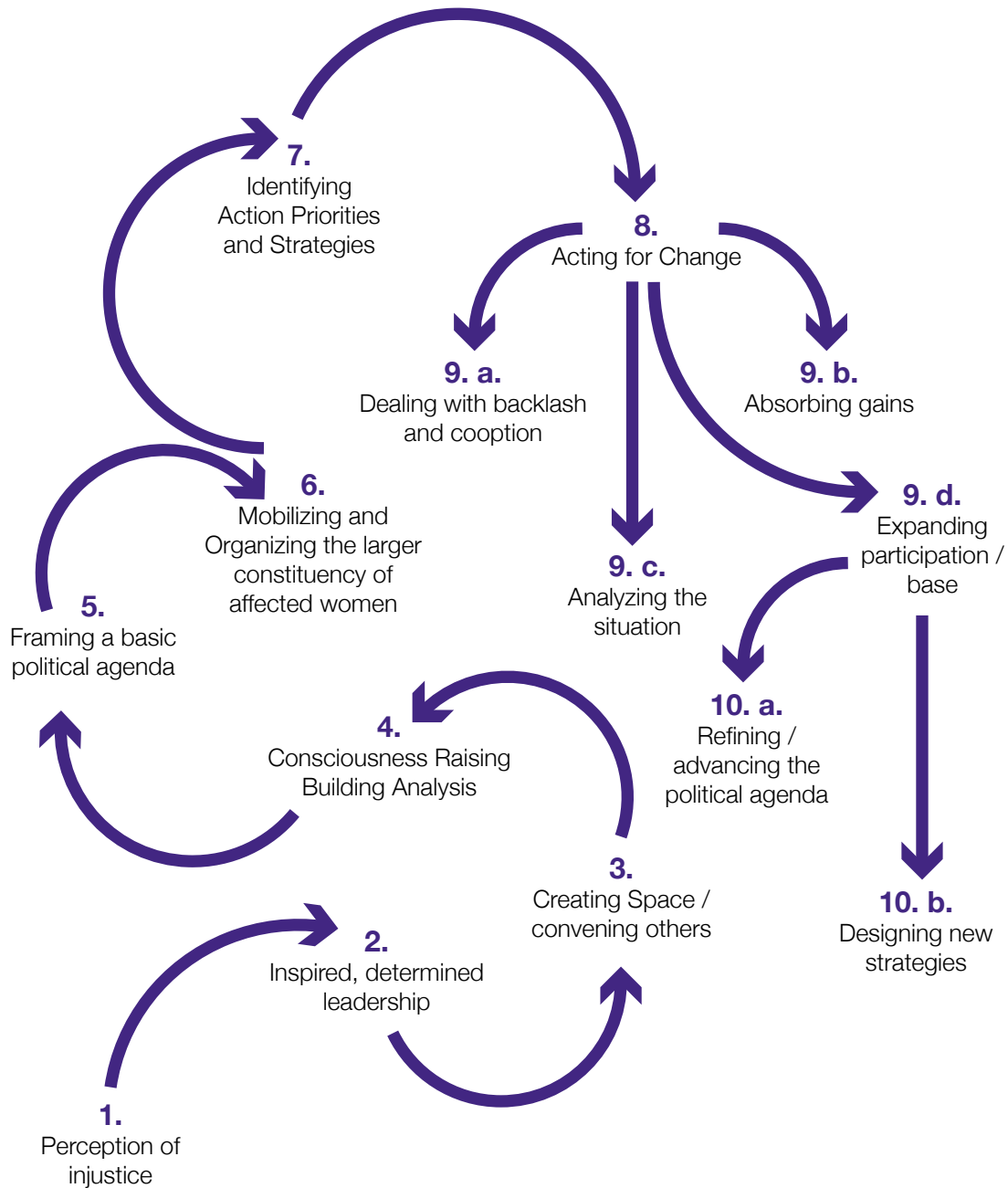


It may also be useful to reflect on what our case studies tell us about the basic steps involved in movement building—how they got from their point of catalysis to where they are now. This is not intended as an oversimplified prescription, magic mantra or foolproof formula for movement building. There is no single path or methodology for building movements. We are well aware, from the many movements we have studied, helped build ourselves, or been allied with, that movement building is a messy process, and is unique to each context, constituency, and cause. This map itself has emerged from women movement



builders undertaking these steps without necessarily having a route map telling them what to do next. Rather, it is a case of trying to learn from the experiences of those who have successfully built women's movements, and harvesting this experience to help us ask ourselves important questions about where we may be on that path, and where we may want to go next.

Figure 3: Elements in Movement Building



## Organization-Movement Relationships

In the introduction to this volume, we presented a typology of organization-movement relationships, and discussed their characteristics and dynamics. Our case studies validate this analysis very convincingly, they illustrate the complex and variegated range of organizations that exist in relationship to movements, namely:

1. **Movement created organizations (MCOs)**, are formal and informal organizations set up *by movements* to govern themselves and strengthen accountability to their constituency / members, promote visibility, democratize representation, voice, and decision-making, manage services, and negotiate movement members' interests and priorities with other actors. Examples of MCOs can be found in the case studies of Piqueteras (Argentina), Indigenous Women (Mexico), Domestic Workers (USA), Dalit Mahila Samiti (India), Sex Workers Movements (Southwest India), Disabled Women (Global), Sudanese Women's Peace Movement (Sudan/Northeast Africa), and Czech Mothers (Czech Republic).
2. **Movement-building or supporting organizations (MBOs)**, are organizations that stand in relationship to a specific movement, and whose purpose is to build and strengthen that movement. Some examples of this category of relationship are organizations like Vanangana (Dalit Women's Movement), GROOTS Kenya, SANGRAM (the Sex Workers Movement), SuWEP (Sudanese Women's Peace Movement), and GALANG (Poor Urban Lesbian Women's Movement) who exist to build and support the movements of the constituencies to which they are committed and connected.
3. **Organizations merging to form movements.** Roman Women Movement (IRWN, JRWI), One in Nine Campaign and some of the national and regional disabled women's organizations are all examples of this. Their relationships with grassroots constituencies varies widely, however—while the organizations that formed the One-In-Nine Campaign and Disabled Women's networks clearly have extensive grassroots presence among poor women and communities, Roman Womens Movement (IRWN and JRWI) are yet to successfully mobilize and organize the mass of poor Roma women across the East European countries whose rights and interests they seek to advance.
4. **Organizational allies of movements.** There are a range of these visible in our case studies. Feminist academics, research groups and feminist organizations of various kinds have provided capacity building, critical linkages, and other forms of support to the Indigenous Women (Mexico), the Domestic Workers (USA), and the GALANG (Philippines). UN agencies as well as some bilateral donors have been critical allies in several cases (such as UNIFEM in the case of the Indigenous Women (Mexico); UNHABITAT with the Czech Mothers; and the Dutch Government in the case of SuWEP and its predecessors). In the Palestinian case, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was a key ally of the progressive women's movement and its organizations. In the case of the Piqueteras, a number of left parties and trade unions were initially supportive allies, but later coopted the movement and exploited its organizational base for their own ends.

**The relationship dynamics** in each of these configurations can be unpacked and explored for deepening our understanding of how organizations and movements work together. In our fourteen case studies, several patterns or directionalities were evident:

- **Equilateral / circular.** Not surprisingly, the movement-created organizations in our case studies exhibit the flattest and most equilateral relationships of all. Having been created by the movement, these organizations—such as the Indigenous Women (Mexico), Domestic Workers (USA), Dalit Mahila Samiti (India), One in Nine Campaign (South Africa), or Czech Mothers (Czech Republic)—exist to serve and structure the constituency's organizing and strategic goals. Several of the movements, however, have exhibited remarkable foresight and understanding of how formal positions even within MCOs can lead to unhealthy power dynamics. So most of these movements have planned or actually put in place a number of mechanisms to neutralize this tendency—ensuring leadership training opportunities for ALL

their members, or systems of rotating leadership or term limits in formal roles. In this, they are holding up a very critical mirror to mainstream women's organizations, where lack of leadership change and concentration of power have become major challenges.

- **Symbiotic** In this dynamic, neither the movement-building organization nor the movement has greater overall control or power, but the two exist in a synergistic and symbiotic relationship with each other—the relationship of Vanangana to Dalit Mahila Samiti in the Dalit women's case, or SANGRAM to VAMP in the sex workers case, for example. It is also noteworthy that some of the MBOs in our case studies have changed their role over time, ceding many of their initial roles to the movement-created organizations they helped catalyze. This is an important lesson for MBOs to reflect on—if your role hasn't changed over time, it is possible that you are not allowing the movement's internal organizations and leadership to mature and take over.
- **Paternalistic / instrumentalist / clientelist** Here, the allies, supporters or movement-building organizations are in command, with the movement leadership and its organizations (if any) being in a dependent or instrumental relationship with the former. The IRWN or JRWI in the Roma case, the political parties and trade unions in the Piqueteras case, or the Palestinian Authority, donors, and professionalized women's NGOs in Palestine, and male-dominated disabled people's federations like Disabled People International, are all good examples of this. The negative impact of this kind of relationship on movements is also clearly illustrated in these cases—namely, the subversion of powerful movements (e.g. the Piqueteras), loss of credibility, relevance, and mass support (Palestinian Women's Movements), the inability to mobilize the larger mass of the constituency (Roma Women), or losing the ability and legitimacy to represent the larger mass of the constituency (Indigenous Women, Disabled Women).

The movements described in the case studies also contain the full continuum of formal to informal organizations discussed in the Introduction to this volume. At the formal end are the well-defined governing structures of the Czech Mothers Centers, National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women in Mexico, and the two unions that formed the National Alliance of Domestic Workers. And at the most informal end are loose relationships built on common understanding or shared agendas, but with few governance, financial or other controls, most beautifully illustrated by the Iranian women's movement.

Another visible factor is the strength of the “glue” that binds the organization-movement relationships in our case studies. The Domestic Workers Alliance is a much looser coalition of local domestic workers' unions than the National Coordinating Committee of the Indigenous Women, or the national council of the Czech Mothers. The Iranian women are at the extreme end of this spectrum because there is no organizational structure whatsoever binding together the local groups of women mobilized in this movement, only their shared struggle. And at the other end of the spectrum, organizations like SuWEP, Vanangana, GROOTS Kenya, GALANG or SANGRAM would have little reason to exist without a very close relationship to the movements they are building, supporting, and resourcing.

One of our cases also highlights the issue of *competition* in the organization-movement relationship, and how competing for resources, or a narrow focus on practical needs at the cost of strategic interests, can impede movement building. In the case study on Disable Women (Global), an African disability activist is quoted as saying:

*“Without solidarity, without an understanding that the fight that we lead is not done in the interest of a sole disabled people's organization, but in the interest of all, we will never achieve any results. Each disabled people's organization to understand that the fight that we lead outweighs the competition and that we have to go forward together to succeed in getting long lasting results”* Ndoya Kane, *Vie Feminine et Handicap*, Senegal (Price, 4).

## Governance and Decision-making Structures

The case studies show that women have used, adapted and transformed structural forms that have evolved in the civil society and social movement terrain over centuries—mass assemblies, unions, federations, networks, and coalitions. Registered legal entities—nonprofits or NGOs—are also a part of the spectrum, both created by movements as governance or representational structures, as well as those that exist precisely to build, support, and serve movements. The case studies depict three broad categories of structural forms assumed by these movements:

- **Coalitions / Networks / Federations** These are women’s organizations or collectives connected with varying degrees of cohesion and closeness around a particular political agenda, and acting together on that agenda. Our case studies abound with these forms: coalitions like the One in Nine Campaign, disabled women’s networks like the South Asia Network of Disabled Women, the National Network of Sex Workers in India, or the networks that constitute SuWEP in North and South Sudan, and federations like the Indigenous Women, the Czech Mothers Centers, or the Domestic Workers unions.
- **NGO-federation partnerships** Such as the Dalit women and Vanangana, the sex workers of VAMP and SANGRAM, or GROOTS Kenya and its women’s groups in Nairobi and other provinces.
- **Underground networks** This is the unique form of the Iranian women’s movement, which has to use word-of-mouth and other informal means of communication to make strategic and other decisions.

Depending on the age, stage, and geographic spread of the movement, the structures evolved for planning, strategizing, and governance have an equivalent number of layers. The **older and more mature movements have often developed more complex structures** than the younger and emerging movements. What is clear, though, is how all are struggling to create highly accountable, democratic, and bottom-up decision-making systems that give their constituents a real sense of voice without sacrificing their agility. The Piqueteras used the informal but very powerful format of popular assemblies and *fogados* reminiscent of the French Revolution. The One in Nine Campaign functioned by convening as many member organization representatives as possible for taking decisions on the run, while the Dalit Mahila Samiti use cluster committees. And a major constituent union of the National Alliance of Domestic Workers (namely, the MUA) uses the *Comite Corazon*—the campaign coordinating “heart” committee—to make rapid decisions. The challenges of creating appropriate decision-making systems are summarized by Dawn Cavanagh, one of the leaders of the One in Nine Campaign:

*“We were running on pure energy, and it was very untidy, it was messy at first; those who were willing and able to do the work, they were the ones doing it, and decisions got made by whoever was able to just be there, and everyone accepted that, it wasn’t until later that we got to sit down and design proper terms of reference and map out a more longterm strategy, we weren’t responding to a pre-planned anything, with a budget, and so on, we were just building as powerfully as we could, it was a totally new way of organizing for us...”* (Bennett, 9).

The systems of governance created by these movements—and particularly the older ones—suggest a **need for us to interrogate notions of formal and informal structures** in movement-building. Clearly, even the most informal seeming structures—the Piqueteras assemblies, GROOTS Kenya’s annual retreats, and One in Nine Campaign’s day-to-day consultations—were highly organized and participatory. But then, so also are the more formal structures of the Indigenous Women’s National Coordinating Committee, the VAMP sex workers collective, SuWEP’s coordinating committees, and the Czech Mothers council. Some—such as One in Nine Campaign have seen a need to move from more informal styles of decision-making in its early stages to a more systematic and democratic approach in order to ensure that it adheres to the feminist values and principles they have consciously adopted for their struggle.

Regardless of the form the structures take, though, a remarkable feature of the movements is that they have all struggled—and largely succeeded—in creating deeply **democratic, representative and layered governance and decision-making structures**. The structures reflect the operation of certain core principles that are clearly feminist, whether the movement calls itself feminist or not, namely:

- **Ensuring voice and representation** for all their members / constituents, especially at the grassroots;
- **Nominating or electing leaders / representatives from each level of their constituents** who form the base, or foundation, of the movement;
- **Forming accessible, participatory units or layers of decision-making** as the movement spreads geographically or grows numerically—cluster committees, local unions, county- or province-level units, local mother’s center board;
- Many of **the structures have ensured accountability to the movement’s base or membership**, displaying a concern for ensuring that the apex decision-making body or NGO is not too powerful, unaccountable, arbitrary, or disconnected from the base. In other words, the process of agenda-setting and decision-making is itself bottom-up rather than top-down. As the GROOTS Kenya case study puts it,

*“The regional groups consistently inform the strategic direction of the organization, and their involvement is multi-faceted. For instance, at the annual retreat, the representatives of the various regions determine the annual fund raising plan of the secretariat. In addition, through the regional focal point leaders, mentorship and direction is provided to the sub groups, so that there is regular consultation and inflow of information from focal point leaders, to the secretariat and back to the various groups in the region. Even at donor meetings, the regional representatives at times negotiate grants on behalf of their regions, while at other times fundraising is done for Groots Kenya” (Okech, 6).*

Another fascinating question is **how autonomous are the various constituent units of these movements**, and over what types of issues or actions do they exercise that autonomy? This is worth debating not only in relation to the NGO-movement relationships in our case studies, but even in the movement-created organizations and governance structures. Many of the constituent units of the movements obviously run their own programs and services at the grassroots level—such as livelihood programs, credit schemes, schools and child care services—relatively independent of the larger federation or umbrella organization of which they are a part (e.g., the case studies Indigenous Women, Palestinian Women’s Movements, and GROOTS Kenya). The network and coalition type structures—such as used by the Domestic Workers Alliance, or Disabled Women International—also follow this approach, with local unions developing their own strategies and tactics. But while there is a high degree of autonomy in designing activities at the local level, most of the movements demonstrate that there is coherence and unity in acting on the collective political agenda. For instance, no section of the Indigenous Women’s movement will go off to negotiate their own agreements with the Mexican government—this would only be done through their National Coordinating Committee, after reaching consensus throughout their layers.

**The leadership structures** are also largely drawn from the mass membership or grassroots constituents of the movement. Even campaigns like One In Nine Campaign, formed by a coalition of NGOs, have ensured that leadership is in the hands of the women who have directly experienced the forms of violence the campaign is addressing, rather than women from the privileged or dominant groups. Where multiple layers of leadership exist, several movements have developed very democratic processes of selection, election, and representation (see the Dalit Mahila Samiti, VAMP, Domestic Workers, and Czech Mothers case studies for example). The systems of accountability of the leadership to the constituents are very strong in some and less clear in other cases. In contrast, a very nascent movement building process like GALANG is experiencing the severe challenges of creating local leadership and ownership.

Overall, the data present in the case studies indicates that these women’s movements **model both the principles and practice of feminist decision-making and governance structures**.



 Forces and Actors Engaged

In pursuit of their diverse political agendas, our movements have resisted, challenged, and engaged an incredibly wide and varied range of actors, institutions, and processes including:

- **Formal institutional actors** at local, national and international levels. Despite the domination of the neoliberal paradigm and the alleged shrinking role of the state, our case studies suggest that the state and its various arms and layers (national and provincial governments, urban municipal councils, etc.), is a key institution engaged by women's movements everywhere. Clearly, women are not ready to abandon—or allow governments to abandon—the primary responsibility and accountability of the state to citizens, and politicians and political parties, holding state power are also frequently targeted in the process. International institutions like the UN and its various units and commissions (UNIFEM, CSW, CSD, etc.), and other international bodies have also been sites of engagement for advocacy or alliance building.
- **National, bilateral, and multilateral policy processes and international “norm structures”** Almost all our movements have been involved in policy processes at various levels and in the creation of new norm structures and instruments that advance formal rights and increase resources for women and their communities. These range from human rights codes, UN resolutions on women, peace and conflict (1325 and 1820), urban habitat norms, international labor standards, environmental agreements, sustainable cities discourses, indigenous people's rights and new “cosmovisions”, HIV and AIDS and micro-credit policies, human rights enforcement standards, sex workers rights, LGBT rights, framing of the UN convention on disability, negotiating quotas for disabled women in education and employment, and peace negotiations in conflict-ridden or occupied territories. These movements have not only used international agreements and norm structures to pressure national or local governments, but also successes at the local level to push for changes at the international norm level. A good example of this is how the the National Alliance of Domestic Workers have worked on labor standards for domestic work at all these levels simultaneously, resulting in the adoption of an international convention on domestic work in 2011.
- **Health, Education, and other Service providers** Movements like that of rural women in Kenya, disabled women, lesbian women and sex workers have challenged and engaged a range of service providers who exclude or marginalize them because of their identity and particular constraints. For instance, disabled women have demanded accessibility from schools, colleges, hospitals and employers; sex workers have challenged the way HIV and AIDS programs position them as disease vectors, rather than legitimate and equal beneficiaries of prevention and treatment services.
- **Warring regimes and factions** Some of our movements have courageously challenged and interacted even with militant, violent actors who have themselves threatened their survival. For instance, the Sudan women's peace movement engaged warring forces and their supporters from the local to the international level to ensure that the women's peace agenda was a part of both the formal peace negotiations and informal peace initiatives at the community and neighborhood level. The immense significance of this cannot be overemphasized—dealing with the very people who may be responsible for the violence committed on you, for your displacement, for the loss of your family and livelihood and natural resource base, takes courage and determination.
- **Market forces and the neo-liberal agenda** The chaos, impoverishment, violence and conflict catalyzed (directly or indirectly) by neo-liberal economic policies has compelled some of our movements to take on market forces and actors in different ways. For some of the movements, neoliberal policies have had direct impacts—such as the growing informalization of work, the dislocation or withdrawal of state-supported services and even, in the case of Argentina, complete economic meltdown. For others, market interests play a powerful but indirect role in shaping their realities: e.g., a root cause of the

civil war in Sudan is the mineral resources in the South, and in the attacks on the rights and habitats of the indigenous people in Mexico. Some of our movements—such as the Piqueteras—have tackled these forces directly, taking over abandoned factories and demanding pro-poor economic reforms. Others are engaging them indirectly, as in the case of the Domestic Workers (USA) or Mothers Centers (Czech Republic), by making common cause with other constituencies affected by the privatization or dismantling of public services.

- **Other social movements or women’s movements** Surprisingly, some of our movements have had to challenge and confront the very movements that should have embraced and advanced their interests, such as women’s movements. Due to factors analyzed in those cases, groups like Disabled Women International and VAMP (sex workers) have had to deal with their exclusion or stigmatization by women’s movements themselves. Similarly, the GALANG movement building process emerged at least partly out of the marginalization or neglect of the issues of poor lesbian women by the Philippine LGBT movement; and even the Mothers Centers movement emerged partly because of European feminist discomfort with the issues and interests of women isolated by their child-rearing roles<sup>3</sup>. Thus, many of our case studies indicate that these movements have had to engage the mainstream of social movements to gain greater visibility and voice, to transform male-dominated movements, to take over movements abandoned by men, and to radicalize movements with a more conventional liberal agenda. In at least one case, however, this targeting has been reversed: in Argentina, it was left political parties and the trade unions that targeted—and later successfully coopted and demobilized—their movement.
- **Social structures and cultural norms** An incredibly broad range of deeply embedded structures of hierarchy, cultural beliefs, and practices have been confronted and challenged by our movements. These include long-standing social structures like racism, patriarchy, and hetero-normativity, discrimination based on caste, ethnicity, ability, nationality, and class. They have also tackled cultural norms that tolerate violence against women—especially “deviant” women like lesbians and sex workers—but also simply because they are considered fair game in situations of war and conflict. They have challenged the social justification and acceptance of the victim image or of the exclusion of certain women because of their ability, occupation, ethnicity, etc.
- **Customary and formal legal systems** Land rights for HIV and AIDS widows, recognition for the rights of disabled or lesbian women, legislation to regulate informal work such as domestic labor, and challenging police inaction in the face of violence against sex workers are all examples of the way many women’s movements have tackled both customary laws and the formal legal and law enforcement system in their contexts.
- **Religious institutions and leaders** The Iranian Women’s Movement has been forced to engage with the national Muslim clergy as well as local imams, to challenge their interpretation of Islamic law, and demonstrate that the denial of rights over their children after divorce or widowhood, or loss of citizenship rights if they marry non-Iranian men, have no basis in or sanction from the Quran or Shari’a. The Sudanese Women’s Peace Movement has similarly had to confront and overcome the narrow roles allocated to women in their communities by religion and custom, and to claim their rights as equal citizens in the peace process.


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3. This point is not raised in the Czech Mothers case study, but is a personal communication of the late Monika Jaekel, one of the founders of the German Mothers Centers, when she described the origins of that movement to the author in 2003. The Czech Mothers movement was inspired and supported by the German Mothers Centers.

 Strategies

The range of strategies used by these movements presents a dazzling array of incredibly innovative and politically astute methods of pursuing their change agendas. Some appear deceptively conventional on the surface, but are applied towards very radical feminist and social justice goals. Given the plethora of strategies used in our case studies, it is impossible to analyze all their dimensions. This section will present a typology of their organizing strategies and interventions.

All the movements used **multi-faceted strategies** that reflected the complex way they framed their issues and their theories of change. None had a uni-faceted strategy or depended on some single “magic bullet” approach, even if they had begun that way. This is an important lesson for those who believe that a single intervention—such as credit or income-generation or quotas—can grow automatically into a movement, or create broader transformative changes in women’s lives. This is the background against which we must view the inter-linking strategies used by our movements, which are described below and depicted in Figure 4.

 Internal Movement Building Strategies

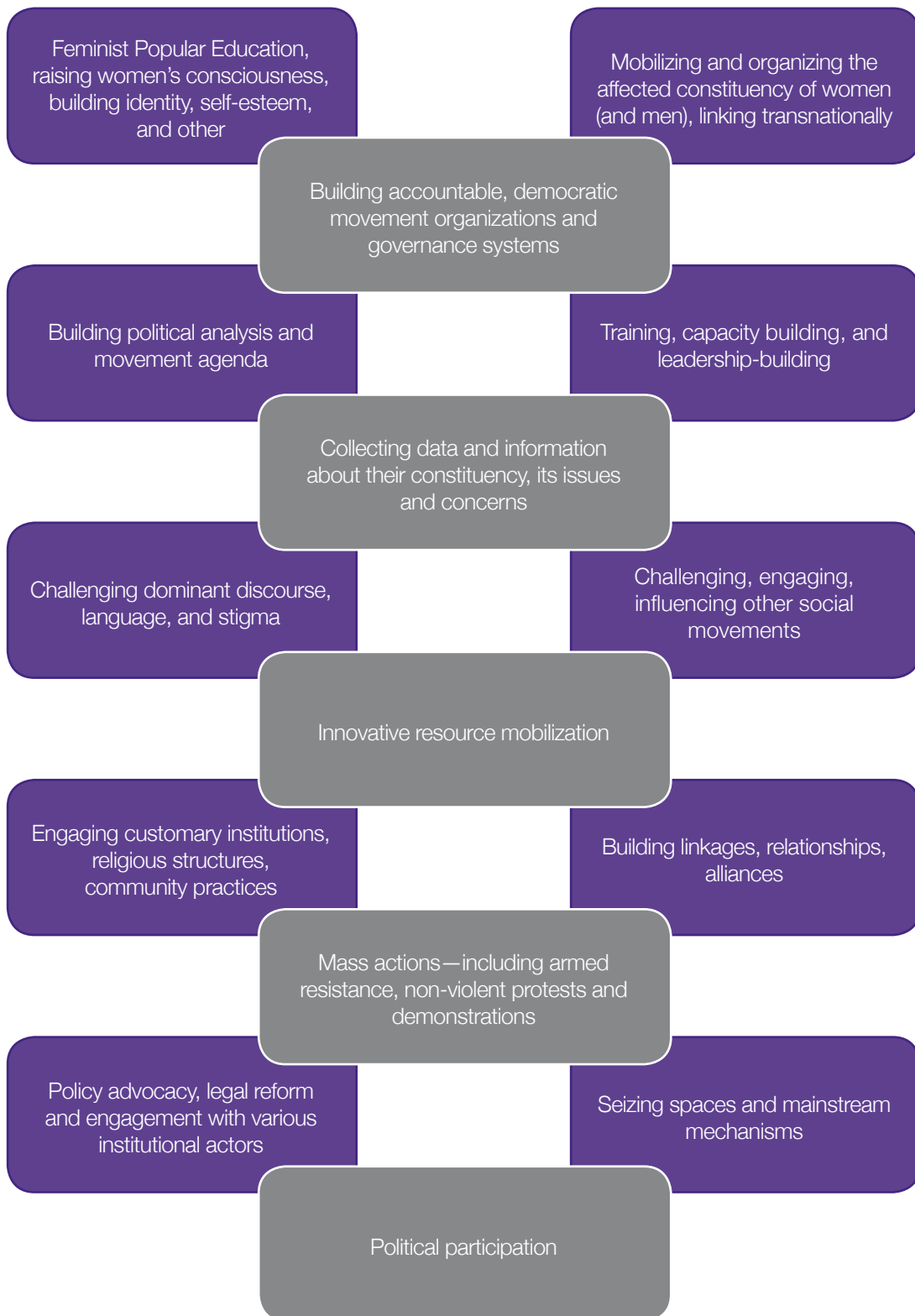
- **Feminist popular education** of various kinds is a fundamental building block in virtually all these movements. They have recognized that mobilizing and organizing women, and building a collective political agenda for the movement, is not possible without raising affected women’s consciousness, awareness of their rights, self-esteem, awareness of the social, economic and political structures and power relations that oppress and exploit them, and thereby unleashing women’s latent revolutionary potential and desire to act for change. Many movements may not term this process feminist or even popular education, but in essence, it is what they have done or are doing. And everywhere, this consciousness raising is tailored to the political and social contexts and realities in which women are located, and in language and constructs that are accessible and meaningful to them.
- This goes hand in hand with **mobilizing and organizing the larger constituency of women**—or as the VAMP/SANGRAM case study puts it, “collectivizing women”. This is just beginning in some of our movements—such as the GALANG group in the Philippines, some disabled women’s groups, or Roma women—while for others, it is at a very advanced and sophisticated stage. Some of our case studies show that mobilization is itself a huge challenge in some contexts— for disabled women, for instance, accessibility issues make it enormously difficult even to organize face-to-face gatherings to build a common identity and awareness. With the sex workers, innate competitiveness and suspicion of outside organizers had to be overcome with patience and persistence. With the poor lesbian women in urban slums, apathy and dependence bred by patronage politics are the barriers. For the Czech mothers, there was no safe space to meet but the sidewalk or a café. For domestic workers, it was difficult for these overworked women to find the time. And with the women of Sudan and Iran, ceaseless conflict and a draconian, repressive regime posed immense obstacles to their organizing. Indeed, as Mary Nyaulang of the Sudan women’s peace movement put it,

*“Coming together as the women of Sudan was not an easy thing. First, we could not agree on the issues we were going to address. We could not agree on a common agenda” (El Sawi, 7).*

- The forms of organizing vary from formal to informal, and these choices have been made based largely on the political and social context in which the movements operate, as well as the nature of their mission and constituency. Thus while the Iranian regime has not been able to identify a single organization or leader that controls the entire movement and who could be targeted for repression, the movements of the sex workers, Dalit women, Czech mothers, domestic workers, and grassroots Kenyan women



Figure 4: Women’s Movements’ Strategies



present layers upon layers of mobilization, organization and leadership. Some movements—most notably that of indigenous women, Czech mothers, and disabled women—have also linked transnationally to strengthen their regional and global presence and advocacy.

- What is important, though, is that our case studies demonstrate that **women are capable of mobilizing and building movements under even the most hazardous circumstances**. This belies the notion of “enabling and disabling” conditions for movement building—our cases seem to assert that movements can and have been built **despite**—and sometimes almost *because of*—such conditions!
- **The development and refinement of their political analysis and agenda** has been a key strategic component in all these movements. Our case studies demonstrate the evolution of their thinking about the social, political, economic and cultural basis of their subordination, about the nature of the power dynamics that exclude and marginalize them, about the non-material as well as material bases of their exclusion and oppression, and the sophistication of their political agendas have grown and refined along with their analysis.
- **Strengthening their own organizations and governance structures** seems to be a key part of their internal strategies. As they have grown and expanded, many of these movements have attempted to create democratic, accountable, and representative participation, decision-making and governance systems. There is clearly a conscious attempt to tackle and eschew the centralization of power and the exclusionary tendencies of mainstream structures.
- **Training, capacity-building and leadership development** have been critical to this process of building democratic organizations and accountable governance. Several movements have placed great stress on ensuring leadership training opportunities for all their members. Political participation—both in formal roles as elected representatives as well as in other political spaces—has also been used to influence the institutions they engage or enter.
- It is interesting to note that none of these movements is entirely dependent on external funding or donor-driven. Many have used **innovative strategies of mobilizing resources** including membership fees, paid services, leveraging their own spaces and financial and other resources, and contributions in kind (see, for instance, the Solidarity Fund for Kosovar Roma Refugees, home-based care provision by Kenyan women, self-supported Mothers Centers, Dalit women’s pooled savings and Iranian women’s completely self-resourced organizing). This should not justify the declining priority among major donors for movement building approaches, but does indicate that women always find ways of supporting their movements. The question really is not whether movements can be built or survive without external resources, but what they might achieve if they were more richly resourced.

 External Action Strategies

**Challenging dominant discourse and language** is a key strategy of the majority of these movements, but has been most critical to the work of sex workers, disabled women, Dalit women, indigenous women, lesbian women, violence survivors, and mothers. Each of these struggles have attempted to challenge and change the way they, their social role and their issues are depicted by external actors—be they academics, feminists, social activists, the government, the media—and the stereotypical images that grip the popular imagination. Typically, they have overturned public perceptions of these women as helpless victims, deviants, or vamps.

- One way in which this has been done is by **building alternate data and information** (especially through participatory research methods) to challenge mainstream images and analysis of their issues,

and to engage policy makers in an informed way. But it has also been a means of mobilizing and politicizing their own constituents. These movements recognized and deployed the power of their own knowledge, and of engaging dominant knowledge systems on their own terms.

- All the movements in this volume have **built new linkages, relationships and alliances** to strengthen their power, influence and visibility, or gain access to new spaces and processes, gain political leverage, or protect themselves. For Iranian, Sudanese, and Mexican indigenous women, for instance, international linkages were vital to protecting their leaders and voices, and to keeping their issues—and their repression—on the international stage. These linkages have also been with other social movements, sensitizing and educating their leaders (Dalit Mahila Samiti, One in Nine Campaign, Iranian Women’s Movement), sometimes in ways that have helped revive them—the National Alliance of Domestic Workers, for instance, helped put new vigor into the US Social Forum and the social movements of that region.
- But along with building alliances, **challenging / engaging other movements** has been a key strategy for movements like that of disabled women and sex workers. The disabled women’s case discusses this in detail, especially the impact of their marginalization by both the women’s movement and the male-dominated disabled people’s movement. The sex workers case analyzes the long struggle to gain space within feminist movements in their region, and a recognition of their rights.
- Our case studies are also replete with examples of the use of **policy advocacy, legal reform and engagement with a range of formal and customary institutional actors**. This ranges from “educating” local officials and government representatives to grasp their approaches and support rather than obstruct their work (Czech Mothers, GROOTS Kenya), to **legal advocacy** (Domestic Workers, Palestinian Women’s Movements). **Engaging religious and customary institutions and leaders** has also been critical for many movements—lobbying, for instance, for reform of religious laws and codes, or claiming non-traditional public roles—is a vital strategy for some of our movements (Iranian Women’s Movement, Roma Women, GROOTS Kenya, Sudanese Women’s Peace Movement).
- **Mass actions of various kinds** are an obviously critical strategy used by several movements. Sometimes, this has involved **armed resistance** (as in the case of the Piqueteras, Indigenous Women) or **non-violent resistance** demonstrations, marches, etc. (Iranian Women’s Movement, One in Nine Campaign). We could even include here the “No Sex Without Condoms” campaign of the VAMP sex workers collective. The point is that women’s movements can and do engage in militant mass action.
- **Seizing spaces, mechanisms or control** usually exercised by other, more powerful actors, is evident in several of our movement case studies. Some examples of this are the Piqueteras who took over the factories that were abandoned by the bosses and their male compatriots; the take over of outreach and HIV awareness work (normally done by NGOs) with their clients and lovers by sex workers, seizing the right to recognize and reward from the state (CM instituting a “Family Friendly Prize” for city officials), and using religious gatherings and meetings to raise women’s rights issues (Iranian women). And of course, political participation in the form of seeking election and formal representational roles would also be included as part of this strategy.

The above is only a very brief and cursory summary of the hugely diverse and innovative strategies—both internal and external—that women’s movements have developed in pursuit of their agendas and visions of change. The case studies themselves offer a much richer analysis of movement strategies.

 Achievements and Influence

The case studies present an incredible range of achievements, and numerous spheres in which they have exercised influence on public attitudes, discourse about their issues, and on law, policy, and practice. The multiplicity of these impacts are, in a sense, well articulated in the indigenous women's journey:

*"The new spaces for participation, the multiple dialogues established with various social actors, and a new approach to the rights of women and the rights of indigenous peoples, have necessarily upset gender roles....All these organizational spaces—whether independent or governmental—may be conceived of as spaces for the production of meaning, a process that has led indigenous women, intentionally or unintentionally, to reflect on their condition, thereby producing an interchange between gender, ethnicity, and social class" (Proyecto Colectivo cited. López Cruz, p 31).*

*".... [The] Discourse impacts on feminism and feminists: broadening the comprehension of how to relate gender identity to other identities, such as that of class and ethnicity; recognizing and understanding the resistance of many women to controversial themes in the feminist movement, such as sexuality; dismantling the view of indigenous women as a vulnerable group lacking the ability and power to bring about changes in their own condition; recognizing the need to create alliances with other social movements and to reflect on the role that men should have in the struggle for gender equity; and recovering numerous forms of struggle and resistance that are innovative for the feminist movement, above all with a view to the construction of a broader social base, capable of becoming a counterweight to de facto power" (López Cruz, p 31).*

The case studies themselves reflect the impressive range of achievements of these movements, as does the analysis of their internal and external strategies. These do not need to be repeated, but can be summarized as falling into these key categories:

- Impressive numbers of women have been mobilized and organized.
- Affected women's political and personal consciousness has been raised.
- Discourse has been challenged, advanced, and reframed.
- Women's space, voice, and visibility has been enhanced.
- Laws, policies, and development paradigms have been challenged, influenced, and changed.
- Access to justice and redress has been enhanced.
- New bodies of information and knowledge have been created.
- Concrete new resources and assets for have been claimed and gained by women.
- Women have accessed new skills and capacities.
- Discriminatory customary practices and power relations have been challenged and changed.
- Impressively innovative, democratic, and transparent structures of movement leadership and governance have been constructed.
- Women have challenged and sensitized other social movements to their interests and concerns.
- Women have brought their issues, perspectives, and priorities into public consciousness.

## In Conclusion

What is it, in essence, that these women's movements have accomplished to a remarkable degree, often under seemingly overwhelming odds? What are the stories of these movements trying to teach us? A simple but deeply profound answer is offered by Shirin Ebadi, 2004 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and one of the champions and icons of the Iranian women's movement, who says: "It's not just about hope and ideas, it's about action... Our duty is to have a dream, but work everyday for reality."

Reading the experiences of the powerful and amazing movements in the case studies is both humbling and inspiring—they show us the dreams that inspired them, but also the hard everyday work it takes to change reality. In every case, a handful of strong, committed and politically conscious women began these feminist revolutions by saying "Enough! This must change!" And they show that strong, committed and politically conscious women are everywhere, ready to mobilize and organize their sisters, challenge the status quo and powers that be—including their own brothers, confront and resist violence and repression, and claim their place at the policy table as well as in other movements for social justice. The possibilities for change that these movements represent will hopefully inspire more of us to re-dedicate ourselves to building strong, vibrant feminist movements wherever we are located in the world. Let us build new dreams, and let us work everyday for a new reality for the world's women.

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## Appendix 1

### Changing their World Case Studies and Authors

*Changing Their World: Concepts and practices of women's movements*  
1st edition with case study summaries. by Srilatha Batliwala

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by *Homa Hoodfar* 2008
- The Dalit Women's Movement in India: Dalit Mahila Samiti  
by *Jahnvi Andharia with the ANANDI Collective* 2008
- Domestic Workers Organizing in the United States  
by *Andrea Cristina Mercado and Ai-jen Poo* 2008
- Challenges Were Many: The One in Nine Campaign, South Africa  
by *Jane Bennett* 2008
- Mothers as Movers and Shakers: The Network of Mother Centres in the Czech Republic  
by *Suranjana Gupta* 2008
- The Demobilization of Women's Movements: The Case of Palestine  
by *Islah Jad* 2008
- The Piquetera/o Movement of Argentina  
by *Andrea D'Atri and Celeste Escati* 2008
- GROOTS Kenya  
by *Awino Okech* 2008
- The European Romani Women's Movement—International Roma Women's Network  
by *Rita Izsak* 2008

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with case study summaries. by Srilatha Batliwala

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- The Seeds of a Movement—Disabled Women and their Struggle to Organize  
by *Janet Price* 2012
- GALANG: A Movement in the Making for the Rights of Poor LBTs in the Philippines  
by *Anne Lim* 2012
- The VAMP/SANGRAM Sex Worker's Movement in India's Southwest  
by *the SANGRAM/VAMP team* 2012
- Women Building Peace: The Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace (SuWEP) in Sudan  
by *Zaynab El Sawi* 2012

Just like the first edition, *Changing their World: Concepts and practices of women's movements second edition* clarifies our concept of movements, especially feminist movements, by analyzing the experiences of strong and vibrant women's movements in different parts of the world, to understand how they evolved, strategized, and made an impact.

In addition to the original ten case studies, this second edition presents a revised conceptual framework and analysis, as well as featuring summaries of four new case studies documented between 2009 and 2010. These new case studies focus specifically on the movements of sex workers in Southwestern India, of lesbian women living in conditions of poverty in the Philippines, of the global disabled women's movement-in-the-making, and of the women's peace movement in war-torn Sudan. The four case studies give visibility to diverse expressions of women's organizing whose movement building experiences have traditionally not been part of mainstream women's movements.

Sharing and understanding the experiences of these women and the emergent movements enriched and sharpened the conceptual framework presented in the first edition, as one that explicitly links organizational strengthening process to movement building from a feminist perspective.

