

SOCIAL
MOVEMENTS AND
GRASSROOTS
ORGANIZING:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RRCOF

REPRODUCTIVE
RIGHTS
COALITION
AND ORGANIZING
FUND

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SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND
GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING: LESSONS
FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
AND RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ms. Foundation for Women has been creating opportunities for women and girls for almost thirty years. We conduct advocacy and public education campaigns, and direct resources of all kinds to cutting-edge projects across the country that nurture girls' leadership, protect the health and safety of women and girls, and provide low-income women with the tools to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. Creator of the award-winning Take Our Daughters To Work[®] Day program, the Ms. Foundation is also a recipient of a Presidential Award for Excellence in Microenterprise Development for our longstanding commitment to improve economic prospects for low-wage women, their families and their communities.

OVERVIEW

Social change efforts are underway throughout the U.S. and the world. Many of them, past and current, have launched and sustained broad and deeply rooted movements to improve political, economic, social, legal and ecological conditions in local, regional, national and international contexts. But for many working within these movements, the daily realities of insufficient time, staff or funding and external or internal opposition and challenges make analysis of the process of social change—how it comes about, what factors are critical, why success is sometimes followed by a backlash or new threats—impossible.

And yet, information on other social movements and how they have or have not realized their goals can be a critical factor in the success of current social change undertakings, particularly those to promote and ensure reproductive health and reproductive rights. It is in the context of these realities and needs that the Ms.

Foundation for Women commissioned the study, *Social Movements and Grassroots Organizing: Lessons for Reproductive Health and Rights Organizations*.

The report seeks to provide a framework for thinking about social change by which the current movements for reproductive rights and reproductive health can be contextualized and examined, and new or additional tactics, strategies and priorities for action determined. In the sections that follow, the Executive Summary covers three central questions from the report:

1 What are the major structural and analytic components of social movements that are universal, cutting across ideology, politics and issue focus? Material here is drawn from a review of the academic literature on social movement building and grassroots community organizing.

2 Which social movement strategies have had the greatest impact on advancing the agendas of U.S.-based movements for social change (civil rights, the conservative right, environmental justice or contemporary labor)? This section is based on case studies of the four movements' origins and development.

3 How can the theory and practice of social movements help advance the reproductive rights and reproductive health movements? This section draws from social change theory, its application in the four movements profiled, and discussions with people working in the women's health and reproductive health and rights movements.

"Right-wing grassroots efforts to close abortion clinics, kill affirmative action, and put gays and lesbians back in the closet have never bothered with stop signs at all. Perhaps they know something we forgot. Good organizing issues are deeply felt, controversial. Our problem is that the gap from the small and winnable to the large and significant is often unbridgeable."

- Gary Delgado, *The Last Stop Sign: If Community Organizing Is to Live, It Must Change*, 1999.

This Executive Summary is not intended to be a how-to guide on social movement building or grassroots community organizing (GCO). Rather, it is a short compendium of the theory and practice of successful social movements with an emphasis on grassroots community organizing and multi-issue approaches. The full report, prepared by Kingslow Associates of Chicago, was commissioned to help advance the work of the Ms. Foundation for Women's Reproductive Rights Coalition and Organizing Fund (RRCOF).

SUCCESSFUL MOVEMENT STRATEGIES

The research literature and documented experience demonstrate that all effective movements for social change share a common set of strategies, including:

- 1** Using tactics that make the most of existing political opportunities;
- 2** Forming alliances and coalitions that expand the movement's base of support, its political power and relevance, both locally and at regional and national levels;
- 3** Relying on indigenous institutions as "incubators" for movement development;
- 4** Establishing multiple levels of organization that keep local autonomy while also building regional or national strength;
- 5** Making grassroots community organizing a central tenet and consistent operational activity;
- 6** Developing and deploying "bridge leaders" to broaden the movement's links to and roots within communities;
- 7** Focusing on a clearly defined set of goals (policy- and program-oriented) that both unify movement supporters and also address their multiple needs and rights; and
- 8** Framing movement goals and strategies in ways that internally motivate supporters of the movement and build broad, external public support.

SECTION 1

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Along with effective and coordinated strategies (as listed above), a number of structural factors, grounded in political, economic and social realities, are also critical to social movements' impact. Scholars and practitioners have identified three major contexts that help or hamper movements for social change.

1. POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

This term refers to the set of larger social, political and economic conditions external to a social change movement that can foster or constrain movement develop-

Political opportunities are the conditions external to a movement that can foster or constrain the movement's development.

ment. Central factors in the creation or closing off of political opportunities are: the openness or closure of the existing political system; the stability of alignments among political and economic elites that underlie and help determine how society is organized; the presence of allies within elites (e.g., political, philanthropic, media or academic); and the government's capacity for and

likelihood of taking punitive measures against movement leaders or supporters. While the progress of social movements is shaped by political opportunities, movements also create and shape political opportunity. In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, the civil rights movement capitalized on divisions between Southern "Dixiecrats" and Northern "labor liberals" to gain support for its legislative agenda. An "optimistic rhetoric of change" is also important in convincing potential movement members that political opportunities support the possibility of change (as well as the desir-

ability of change). Such rhetoric, and the actions it seeks to promote, focuses on opportunities within the political process—not constraints or limitations.

2. FRAMING PROCESSES

How issues are framed impacts the collective social interpretation that determines how problems are seen and understood by movement

supporters and the broader public, as well as how actions to address them are perceived. Shared frames (or ways of seeing and understanding) give people reasons to act. They also help create the conviction that if individuals mobilize they will have a chance of success. Indeed, if such motivating ideas or interpretations are absent, it is unlikely that people will take action, even if political opportunities exist. Successful issue frames are often re-used and reinterpreted by successive social movements. For example, the contemporary conservative movement has used frames first developed by the civil rights movement, like defining equal rights in terms of anti-discrimination standards. And

by defining the environment as "where we live, work, study, play and pray," the environmental justice movement has expanded the frame through which environmental issues are viewed by the public and members of the movement themselves. The primary focus of most environmental activism—protecting wildlife, habitats and natural resources—is expanded to include an assessment of the links

The framing process determines how problems are seen and understood by movement supporters and the broader public.

between environmental quality and human health, human rights and livelihoods. As social movements gain success, intense “framing contests,” waged primarily through the media, often develop between supporters of the movement and opponents.

3. MOBILIZING STRUCTURES

Mobilizing structures are the organizations, both formal (labor unions and church groups) and informal (networks of friends and family members) that provide the space to launch and then sustain and build movements. In the early stages of social change movements, “incubator” organizations (like churches, colleges, community-based civic associations or even kinship and friendship networks) are important spaces for nurturing and then expanding the movement and specifically, grassroots organizing efforts. In later stages, movements need to build stronger and more dedicated organizational structures—social movement organizations (SMOs), including “organizations of organizations” like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Christian Coalition—that can coordinate and sustain collective action by linking local activist groups to regional and national movement organizations and leaders.

The Role of Grassroots Community Organizing (GCO)

Grassroots community organizing (GCO) is a critical component of all effective social movements. GCO can be defined as the “effort to mobilize and empower a socially linked group of people by building democratic organizations capable of taking effective action on problems and issues that concern the community.” Grassroots organizing efforts serve as incubators for leadership and organizational development for the larger movement, especially during periods when political opportunities run counter to movement goals. GCO may also provide the most effective means of

Mobilizing structures are the organizations that provide the space to launch and then sustain and build movements.

broadening a movement’s base of support by bringing individuals in and linking them to local centers of activity. In addition, GCO is a major means of building the larger set of mobilizing structures essential to social movements’ success, including creating the “organizations of organizations” central to both the civil rights and contemporary conservative movements.

GCO may also be the most effective way of expanding the social base of a movement that lacks class, race and/or gender diversity.

Current labor organizing, for example, is heavily focused on recruiting women and people of color into the historically White male movement. A new round of GCO, like that being undertaken by unions, can also inject new life into a social movement that has become static or that does not have a strong grassroots base. Indeed, it is unlikely that such a movement will be reinvigorated without fresh grassroots organizing efforts. Within the civil rights movement, intensive GCO begun in the 1940s and 1950s, combined with new political opportunities and strategies to leverage them, helped propel the movement into a period of heightened activism and gain it mass support. Strong social movements may also inspire new waves of GCO that provide the groundwork for new movements (e.g., the

environmental justice movement has its roots in the civil rights struggles of the 1960s) or, in some cases, counter movements.

The “community” in GCO may be determined by location (e.g., a neighborhood), by common values and practices (a religious affiliation or ethical beliefs), or by important aspects of individual or group identity (e.g., race, class or gender). Although much of the social movement literature focuses on left-of-center political movements, GCO can and has been used by groups of

any political orientation—radical, reformist, conservative or even reactionary. Indeed, the strength of the contemporary conservative movement is largely based on its effective use of GCO.

In *Let the People Decide* Robert Fisher suggests that GCO is most successful when it frames issues in larger causes and goals (e.g., social justice, equality, a moral renewal, economic justice), and

when organizing efforts reinforce the significance of a larger political vision. Such frames promote greater political understanding and help create support at the grassroots for an agenda more ambitious than simply meeting local needs. As such, political education must be a central part of the organizing process. Within the civil rights movement, for example, “bridge leaders”—a cadre of mostly African-American women denied formal

leadership positions in the movement because of their gender—brought movement goals and strategies to isolated rural communities. There, they offered education on the existing political process. At the same time, they worked to address communities’ immediate concerns, frame these concerns within the overall civil rights struggle and connect local communities’ activism to the movement’s overarching and long-term political goals.

Grassroots community organizing is the “effort to mobilize and empower a socially linked group of people by building democratic organizations capable of taking effective action on problems and issues that concern the community.” - Felix G. Rivera and John L. Erlich, *Community Organizing in a Diverse Society*, 1998.

SECTION 2

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES: FOUR CASE STUDIES

The civil rights, contemporary right and environmental justice movements all emerged from indigenous grassroots institutions that then linked to or evolved into the larger mobilizing structures that have sustained the movements. The experience of these three movements, along with that of the contemporary labor movement, of political opportunities, framing processes and mobilizing structures

in the political opportunity structure helped strengthen the three community-based institutions that would serve as the key mobilizing structures for the civil rights movement: Black churches, Black colleges and Southern chapters of the NAACP. As the cotton-based Southern economy collapsed, massive rural-to-urban migration of African-Americans took place in the South, along with huge waves of

As in many successful social movements, leaders in the civil rights movement also shaped political opportunities. For example, movement leaders and activists worked to leverage the inconsistencies between important American cultural values (e.g., “all men [sic] are created equal”) and conventional social practices (segregation); they also successfully used African-Americans’ situation as outsiders to and underdogs within American political, economic and cultural life to gain recognition and support from elected officials for movement goals. In the late 1960s, however, the structure of political opportunities began to undercut the civil rights movement. Many Democratic politicians came to view civil rights as a liability with voters (a “White backlash” at the polls took place after the 1967-68 riots in urban ghettos) and in 1968, Richard Nixon was elected president with significant support from disaffected White Southerners, large numbers of them Democrats.

In social change movements, grassroots community organizing is a basic and powerful factor in strengthening each movement’s roots and extending its reach.

highlight the combination of factors identified by both theorists and practitioners as essential to social movement building. In all four movements, grassroots community organizing (GCO) undertaken through movement mobilizing structures, was and remains a basic and powerful factor in strengthening each movement’s roots and extending its reach, impact and durability.

Black migration to the North. This migration increased the size and strength of Black urban communities in Southern states and expanded Black voting power in the North. World War II also played a role: anti-Nazi efforts helped reduce Americans’ acceptance of virulent racism, and political leaders were wary of negative international publicity about the U.S.’ treatment of African-Americans. In addition, the federal government, during and after the era of Roosevelt, was more open to civil rights issues and Roosevelt himself appointed several African-Americans to policy positions.

1. LEVERAGING POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Civil Rights Movement

In the 1930s and 40s, critical shifts

The Contemporary Conservative Movement

The contemporary conservative movement’s emergence in the

1970s and 1980s was also facilitated by a set of political opportunities. These included: perceptions among some segments of the public that their “traditional moral values”

The conservative movement capitalized on the perception that moral values were under attack from the new social issues of the 1970s (feminism, reproductive rights, and gay and lesbian rights).

were under attack from the new social issues of the 1970s (e.g., feminism, reproductive rights and gay and lesbian rights) and, supportive of their goals, the election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980 as an avowed conservative. The movement’s effective use of these political opportunities was driven less by the relative openness of existing political institutions and more by the presence, stability and persistence of a network of elite allies. This included those who had built the intellectual basis of the “New Right” movement of the 1970s. Indeed, it was the ability of this New Right elite to stimulate development of the necessary mobilizing structures, and their recognition that conservative policy goals would be realized only through a strong grassroots base, that gave the movement its early momentum.

The support of large donors, working with a network of powerful conservative foundations, also helped the New Right build a sophisticated infrastructure for sustaining the movement. Among its components are advocacy organizations, media groups, legal organiza-

tions, conservative university programs and academic associations, philanthropic institutions, and publications. Still, despite these establishment support structures (and

like the early civil rights struggle), the contemporary conservative movement’s mass mobilization efforts have largely been funded by a grassroots financial base.

The Environmental Justice Movement

Existing political opportunities leveraged by the environmental justice (EJ) movement include: the continued presence and power of corporate polluters accompanied by rising media and public attention to the consequences; documentation, by both government agencies and community groups, that highly polluting and hazardous facilities are more often located in communities of color, especially, but by no means solely, impoverished ones; and the growing number of local and state elected officials who are people of color, with many having ties to social justice and community development activists in rural and urban minority communities.

The Contemporary Labor Movement

The labor movement faces a number of changed and changing political opportunities, including

less certain support from the Democratic Party, an increased emphasis on free trade in both major political parties, and immigration, along with a new economic climate (i.e., the growth of the service and information economies). As a result, the movement has, since the late 1990s, begun focusing more attention on the grassroots and rank-and-file union members. It has also sought to address the race, class, gender and sexual orientation identities that workers bring to the workplace.

2. CREATING EFFECTIVE ISSUE FRAMES

The Civil Rights Movement

Highly effective internal and external framing efforts contributed to the tremendous success of the early civil rights movement. Internally, the movement’s combination of familiar religious values and democratic ideals helped redefine and therefore reframe the social roles of “student” and “churchgoer” to include participation in protest activities. Externally, the movement’s activities, framed in commitments to nonviolence, racial healing and integration, helped it reassure and appeal to a large and influential segment of the White population. In addition, movement leaders sought and received favorable media coverage, often by remaining peaceful in the face of violent responses to their demonstrations from state entities and civilians. The resulting images (e.g., of Bull Connor’s dogs attacking nonvio-

lent demonstrators, including children) shocked and outraged the public and gained their sympathy both nationally and internationally.

The civil rights movement combined religious values and democratic ideals to reframe the roles of “student” and “churchgoer” to include participation in protest activities.

However, after the 1967-68 riots in urban ghettos, the public frame on civil rights shifted. Violence and disorder were no longer seen as the sole province of Southern White racists, but rather as being indigenous to urban Black populations themselves. Internally, toward the end of the 1960s, developing resonant frames became increasingly difficult. Once the civil rights movement expanded beyond the South, it did not appeal as effectively to large segments of its new potential constituency—urban African-Americans who, while often experiencing intense racism, did not live under the strictures of legal segregation. In both the North and the South, the movement lacked the issue focus provided by the oppressive Jim Crow system. By 1970, the civil rights movement had lost its grassroots momentum, along with a unifying organizational structure.

The Contemporary Conservative Movement

The Christian Coalition, which, along with the Moral Majority, is the major mobilizing structure for the contemporary conservative movement, has also employed framing processes effectively. Externally, under the leadership of

ex-president Ralph Reed, the Coalition emphasized its “moral responsibility” and “family values” commitments while keeping its

more controversial—less mainstream—beliefs and policy goals under wraps. Internally, the movement has employed frames on issues and behaviors that resonate with potential constituents’ worldviews, by, for example, portraying abortion as both anti-family and anti-personal responsibility. The contemporary conservative movement has also used God as a framing device, suggesting to potential and actual supporters that “God is on our side,” a conviction that helps movement members overcome temporary setbacks. The belief that God would support civil rights for African-Americans was also critical to engaging long-term support for the civil rights movement and expanding its activist base among both Blacks and Whites.

The Environmental Justice Movement

Within the environmental justice movement, framing processes have been used to expand the definition of what “environment” means and the impacts that pollutants in the environment have and on whom. Mainstream environmental groups generally focus on the negative effects of pollution on wildlife, land and water. EJ groups expand

this frame to include the effects of pollutants and hazardous wastes on frontline workers and communities near or at risk from polluting facilities. This frame has helped create a broad identification with the goals of locally based EJ groups and the larger EJ movement among affected communities.

3. BUILDING MOBILIZING STRUCTURES

The Civil Rights Movement

The early civil rights movement benefited from a mix of indigenous institutions and external support organizations. As a result of rural-to-urban migration, black churches in urban areas saw their congregations swell, along with the church’s resources. Churches offered tangible assistance vital to movement building: meeting spaces, fundraising capacity, skilled orators and strong social networks. Urbanization and greater financing (specifically through the United Negro College Fund) led to a doubling in enrollment at historically black colleges, another strong base for protest activities. In addition, the NAACP had in the 1930s begun to win a string of important Supreme Court victories, raising its profile and relevance to African-American communities in the South. In 1946, NAACP membership had grown to nearly half a million, and by 1950 it was one of the strongest institutions in the Southern Black community. As such, the NAACP became an important resource to the emergent civil rights movement, offering a strong

organizational structure, established networks with community leaders and professionals, legal expertise, and close ties to Black churches. The early movement also enlisted a set of “movement halfway houses” as mobilizing structures. These were progressive organizations external to the civil rights struggle that provided leadership training, helped develop mass political education programs, and supported future movement leaders both financially and organizationally.

In the second half of the 1950s, the movement took a number of critical steps that extended its impact and broadened its activist base. These included launching direct action campaigns such as bus boycotts; building local movement centers to coordinate protest activities (like the Montgomery Improvement Association, organized by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1955 to manage the Montgomery bus boycott); and creating “organizations of organizations” that linked

The civil rights movement broadened its activist base by employing “bridge leaders” to connect rural community activism to the movement’s overarching political goals.

local movement centers to regional or national institutions. Such organizations, like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), brought together previously factionalized groups and leaders around common goals. Movement vitality was preserved by maintaining the autonomy of local level organizations, while aiding in their development. For

example, to strengthen and unite its organizational affiliates, the SCLC held regular workshops, clinics and rallies that raised political consciousness and provided training in direct action protesting to local-level supporters.

Between 1960 and 1965, the civil rights movement expanded rapidly and achieved historic victories by keeping a clearly defined goal—toppling the Jim Crow laws and passing the Civil Rights Act—and developing a series of tactical campaigns that brought together allies across race, class and discipline (e.g., indigenous civil rights campaigners and White, Northern college students during “Freedom Summer” in 1963). In addition, larger social movement organizations (SMOs) were reinvigorated (the Congress on Racial Equality/CORE) or developed (The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee/SNCC), ensuring the movement a strong organizational base.

Although diverse in organizational and leadership style, the common issue focus of the SMOs reduced inter-group infighting and promoted positive collaboration. Social movement organizations like the SCLC, the NAACP, CORE and SNCC also worked to expand the movement by promoting and supporting the start-up of local movement centers through extensive

and sustained grassroots community organizing (GCO). Movement “bridge leaders,” for example, undertook grassroots organizing in rural communities—where it was often difficult and dangerous—in order to link movement leaders (i.e., within the SCLC or the heads of local movement centers) to the growing mass base in Southern Black communities. These bridge leaders, generally women, were often assisted by women from the communities being organized, many of whom became bridge leaders in the larger movement.

The Contemporary Conservative Movement

The contemporary conservative movement emerged in the late 1970s when “New Right” activists persuaded locally active conservative evangelical ministers, led by the Rev. Jerry Falwell, to organize their congregations into a larger conservative political movement—the Moral Majority—and to build effective and durable mobilizing structures. The movement’s other lead organization, the Christian Coalition, is similarly focused on grassroots organizing as the primary means of building and sustaining its membership and political impact. The Moral Majority tapped into an existing network of conservative ministers skilled at building huge churches from the grassroots, and was able quickly, after its launch in 1979, to create a powerful national organization. The Majority coordinated and unified the political work of the local churches, which provided the

essential indigenous organizational resources for movement building.

It is important to note that the Majority initially focused on recruiting members—many dues paying—and did not put a priority on raising outside funding or getting media attention. These efforts paid off: within 2 years of its founding, the Moral Majority had 400,000 members, two million newly registered conservative voters and local chapters in every state, along with \$1.5 million in contributions. As in the civil rights movement, local level leaders and organizations maintained their autonomy while joining a larger organization of organizations. The Majority provided local affiliates with resources, technical assistance, and a general sense of direction. But it did not attempt to control their everyday actions, and did not provide general operating funds to local chapters, except to help with start-ups.

To maintain its grassroots base, the Christian Coalition holds regular training seminars on leadership development and grassroots political organizing and distributes voter guides in the churches.

The Christian Coalition, the other central mobilizing structure of the contemporary conservative movement, was first organized in 1988. Some analysts suggest that the “Religious Right” had peaked after a series of “TV preacher scandals” and Pat Robertson’s failed presidential campaign. But those events helped galvanize the new organization; led by Ralph Reed, a Robertson campaign staff member, the

Coalition built itself from the remnants of the Robertson campaign. Again, by focusing like the Moral Majority on GCO, in less than a year the Coalition had 27,000 members and 12 state chapters. By 1995, it had an estimated 400,000 members and 1,700 local chapters across the country.

The Coalition relies on two main strategies to maintain its grassroots support. The first is regular training seminars designed to develop local leaders who are skilled in grassroots political organizing. As in the civil rights movement, the Coalition relies heavily on these “bridge leaders” to recruit new members within churches and neighborhoods. The second is wide dissemination of voter guides that promote religious conservative candidates. Forty-five million of these guides were distributed during the 1996 elections alone. Church liaisons with local

Christian Coalition chapters are also central, and Coalition-neighborhood alliances are fostered to broaden the Coalition’s local base.

The main mobilizing structures for the contemporary conservative movement—churches—also help sustain Coalition membership, providing a strong sub-cultural community complete with songs, rituals and prayers. Like the civil

rights movement, the contemporary conservative movement’s use of churches to mobilize for political action channels people’s identities and belief systems into an engagement with political issues. This effectively makes political activism seem like a natural outgrowth of being a churchgoer. The Religious Right has also reinforced the mobilizing power of churchgoing through a wide array of religious media outlets, including television shows, radio programs, books, magazines, newsletters, music and Internet sites. In contrast to the civil rights movement, however, the contemporary conservative movement, from its very inception, has been composed of both an elite network of political activists and a strong grassroots base. This combination of elite resources (including leadership, political influence, professional expertise, foundations, think tanks and fundraising capacity) with a grassroots that can be mobilized to influence elective and legislative outcomes has proven powerful, particularly in maintaining the movement’s influence on the Republican Party as well as in broader policy circles.

Still, by the late 1990s, some critics of the movement suggested that despite its mobilizing power, the contemporary right had not succeeded in creating a true “moral majority” in the U.S., or advanced significantly its pro-family agenda at the national level. They also contended that increasingly, the movement’s more extreme issues,

tactics and even candidates were being rejected by the general public and the mainstream political process. However, the Religious Right continues to hold significant electoral power and influence within the Republican Party, due primarily to the strong state-level structures it has built. These entrench movement supporters in statewide and local Republican bodies. In addition, its reliable membership provides a strong, passionately engaged base from which to mobilize and further organize.

The Environmental Justice Movement

Mobilizing structures for the environmental justice (EJ) movement are still primarily local EJ groups that began in the 1960s and 1970s as ad hoc efforts, some of which in the 1980s and 1990s became institutionalized. Almost all EJ groups develop from a community base. For example, work on issues of toxic waste disposal evolved from a grassroots network of working class women in both minority and White communities. Even when they become formalized, EJ organizations still generally comprise small staffs and an active community-based member and volunteer network. The EJ movement is characterized by a large spiritual/religious component in groups' work (particularly among Native American EJ groups), a grassroots-defined politics, limited political theorizing, independence from foundation giving, and a heavy emphasis on GCO, training and skills-

building, as opposed to large-scale policy formulation.

Organizing and direct action are essential elements in the movement's efforts to raise awareness of and obtain redress for the dispro-

The environmental justice movement has developed strong relationships with community groups and uses house meetings for community education, recruitment, and fundraising.

portionate impact of environmental hazards on poor and minority communities. Specific GCO strategies the movement uses include on-going outreach and constituency building; development of strong relationships with community groups and workers in polluting industries and facilities; and the use of house meetings to provide community education and undertake recruitment and fundraising.

EJ movement leaders have focused primarily on building local and regional groups as movement mobilizing structures. Many of these groups are now expanding their scope and reach by forming coalitions at the community level with labor, church and school-based organizations. As a result of these efforts, EJ groups have worked with community gardeners on issues of pesticide use; with tenant and housing groups on asthma and indoor air pollution; with churches and local community development organizations on waterfront access and parks development; and with organized labor in the paper, allied chemical and energy industries on pollution

prevention at industrial plants. Many EJ groups are also building cross-border alliances, for example working with Canadian and Mexican organizations to challenge negative environmental impacts of NAFTA and draft "good neighbor"

agreements with industry. In all of these efforts, mobilization of people at the grassroots has been central.

Still, despite its emphasis on grassroots organizing, the EJ movement also has elite, professional members focused on state and national policy change. This combination of locally derived support, cross-sectoral partnerships and policy expertise has been successful in bringing about the creation of EJ programs within the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, as well as within large, well-funded mainstream environmental organizations and foundations. EJ groups also helped secure President Clinton's executive order requiring the National Institutes of Health to provide resources and its research to community groups advocating for environmental justice.

While the EJ movement has been very successful in building a grassroots base, challenges remain to effective organizing. These include widespread NIMBY (not in my

backyard) attitudes and competition within poor communities for jobs and economic development, along with the challenges of reconciling diverse struggles, styles, cultures and regions. Resource scarcity also makes many movement organizations fragile.

The Contemporary Labor Movement

Within the current labor movement, the “re-teaching” of labor organizing skills at the grassroots is drawing on lessons from GCO models, including identity-based organizing. Many new identity groups have been established within the labor movement, including: Pride at Work, comprising gay and lesbian unionists; the A. Philip Randolph Institute, which has a largely African-American member-

analyses of both power relations and openings for change. Unions are also broadening their organizing and advocacy focus beyond wages and benefits to include other factors that have a critical impact on workers’ lives and livelihoods. Among these are efforts by the AFL-CIO to secure access to Social Security and Medicaid/Medicare and promote voter education, voter registration and civil rights; and initiatives by CLUW to develop youth leadership and ensure childcare, job security and health care for all workers.

New labor movement mobilizing structures include affiliate groups, which are helping unions extend their reach, adopt multiple strategies, and create broader coalitions. One of these, BUILD

non-displacement clause for union workers, and launching an effort to organize Head Start workers. Solidarity also provides health benefits and bank accounts to members; the bank initiative is part of the union’s efforts to stimulate minority-ownership of banks and bank investments.

While GCO has taken on a new importance within the current labor movement, both external and internal obstacles to its success remain. External threats include continued union-busting or union-resisting tactics within industry; ongoing efforts to deny worker rights and grievance processes; and growth in the service and technology sectors, which have relatively few unionized workers or a consensus on the need for unions, especially among younger employees. Other barriers, which play out internally, stem less from a lack of political opportunity than from the labor movements’ impulse to stay with long-standing, familiar methods of organizing. Many long-time union members are unwilling to deal with the grassroots rank-and-file members, unorganized workers and communities. A significant barrier is a perceived and real lack of skill in undertaking grassroots organizing. In addition, some labor organizers, analysts suggest, are overly focused on building membership in the short-term, rather than creating long-term relationships with communities, unorganized workers and the unemployed around issues important to these constituencies.

Many new labor organizers are using identity-based organizing, popular education, and collective action to maintain a grassroots base.

ship; the Labor Coalition of Latin American Activists (LCLAA); the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW); the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU); and the Asian Pacific Association of Labor Activists (APALA). Many of the new labor organizers are using popular education processes to inform their organizing work, and many unions are now employing an organizing model based on collective action (among union and non-union workers) around workplace issues. This model stresses listening, soliciting ideas from union members, and strategic

(Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development), a faith-based coalition, has taken on a range of community development issues, including those related to labor organizing. For example, when BUILD’s leadership determined that redevelopment of downtown Baltimore had not led to better jobs or greater economic opportunity for low-income residents, BUILD helped found Solidarity, a union that any low-wage worker in any industry may join. Solidarity has been active in the political arena, winning a living wage rule and a welfare reform

SECTION 3

LESSONS FOR THE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

Build partnerships with organizations that have a multi-issue focus, represent women of color and working class women, or that can provide needed skill building.

What follows are a set of reflections on how the experiences of other movements for social change described in this Summary are relevant to the reproductive rights and reproductive health movements. Particular attention is given in the following list to broadening the issue focus and expanding the role and relevance of grassroots community organizing (GCO) within current efforts.

These reflections are made in the context of changes within the reproductive rights and reproductive health movements. The last few years have witnessed new strategies and tactics emerging to advance a multi-issue, women's reproductive health and rights agenda grounded in principles of progressive coalition building and grassroots community organizing. Many of the organizations leading these efforts have made progress in: reaching out to new constituents and partners across race and class lines, and issue areas; building the organizational and organizing

capacity of small grassroots organizations and finding ways of balancing a multi-issue agenda with the need to stay focused on protecting abortion rights. It is clear that these organizations are trying to devote more resources to their own development-building staff, recruiting board members and volunteers with specific competencies (including GCO), developing local bases of financial support, and incorporating strategic planning into ongoing work.

To extend and expand this work in the coming years and decades, the following strategic actions are central. All members and supporters of the movements have roles to play:

Broaden the issue frame beyond abortion rights to include issues of access to health care.

1. Political Opportunities

- Develop proactive strategies that challenge and shape existing political opportunities to advance movement goals—going beyond defending ground already won-

while anticipating the actions and tactics of opponents.

- Build partnerships or alliances with other organizations or coalitions that have a multi-issue focus (e.g., that are working on broader economic and health care access issues); represent and include women of color and working class women; and can provide skills or capacity that organizations cannot afford in-house (e.g., expertise in grassroots organizing, capacity building, and organizational and leadership development).
- Promote more diversity and equality by partnering with women of color and working class women's organizations, including around GCO efforts, and bring women of color and

working class women into leadership positions and decision-making.

2. Framing Processes

- Broaden the issue frame beyond

abortion rights to include issues of access to reproductive health care and equity.

- Create interpretive frames that resonate with and create a strong buy-in to movement goals.

3. Mobilizing Structures and Grassroots Community Organizing

- Invest time and resources in sustained, strategic campaigns of GCO, characterized by one

Invest time and resources in sustained, strategic campaigns of grassroots community organizing; this includes constituency building and education, and partnering with community groups.

interviewee as “the step-child of the pro-choice movement,” including: outreach and constituency building; partnerships with community groups or activists; house meetings for education, recruitment and fundraising; and linking GCO efforts to the political process.

- Train and support GCO practitioners, including “bridge leaders,” within social movement organizations and smaller state and local groups.
- Incorporate staff, board members and volunteers with GCO experience into organizations and coalitions.
- Build the overall organizational capacity of local and state level

groups, including: developing long-term plans that guide organizational growth; devising offensive and defensive strategies to respond to or create political opportunities and effective frames; ensuring organizational stability and staff competency; and developing leadership.

- Strengthen links between local, statewide and regional reproductive rights and reproductive

health organizations and larger movement structures, e.g., “organizations of organizations” (and their infrastructure), that promote local groups’ autonomy.

- Prioritize development of long-term, proactive strategies, and strengthen movement infrastructure.
- Develop mechanisms for movement mobilizing structures to help build the organizational capacity of state and local groups through training, technical assistance and other means, on issues prioritized by local groups.
- Create within the movement the technical capacity to support grassroots organizing and mechanisms to share these experiences.

Funding Strategies

What follows is a short set of reflections specifically for funders, again drawn from the experience of other social movements and those working in support of reproductive rights and reproductive health. Strategic considerations for funders should include:

- Develop flexible funding strategies that value the creation and maintenance of a grassroots base of activists and funders, built through GCO. This will ensure that groups have the funds to respond quickly to changed political opportunities, which cannot be identified in advance.
- Use funding criteria that provide incentives for organizations and coalitions to embrace a broad women’s reproductive health and rights agenda, and to employ techniques not widely adopted by the movements, including GCO. Grant-seeking organizations could be involved in the design and testing of these criteria.
- Support documentation and evaluation of GCO efforts and other new or little-used strategies and tactics. Support is also needed for new methods of assessing and evaluating GCO and funding broad dissemination of these practices and the lessons that emerge (from both successes and failures).

A NOTE ON THE REPORT

Social Movements and Grassroots Organizing: Lessons for Reproductive Health and Rights Organizations is the second in a series of reports by Kingslow Associates commissioned by the Ms. Foundation for Women to advance the work of its Reproductive Rights Coalition and Organizing Fund (RRCOF). The first report, Factors Affecting the Growth and Effectiveness of Reproductive Rights Coalitions (1998), also prepared by Kingslow Associates, examined the role of coalitions in advancing social change. The second report builds on the analysis of basic community organizing models developed in the 1998 report, by framing the discussion within a conceptual understanding of social movements. Social Movements and Grassroots Organizing: Lessons for Reproductive Health and Rights Organizations is designed to provide the Ms. Foundation with theoretical and practical constructs upon which to build strategic approaches for expanding the application and support of GCO within pro-choice and reproductive health networks. Data for the report were drawn primarily from analyses of the literature and interviews with organizers, practitioners and academics. Case studies are used to demonstrate the theoretical principles of social movements and grassroots community organizing.

Copies of the full report are available from the Ms. Foundation for Women,
120 Wall Street, 33rd Floor, New York, NY 10005
(212) 742-2300, ext. 314.

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