

# //A MOVEMENTS PERSPECTIVE ON TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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- **Social movements are networks of organizations and individuals with complementary competencies and limitations. While “formal” organizations are easier to fund, they are also more easily sanctioned by governments.**
- **Social movements contribute to transparency and accountability by linking local claims and executing diverse tactics, particularly by mobilizing citizens to put pressure on decision-makers.**
- **Social movements and funding institutions are dissimilar in structure, durability, and personnel. In order to support movements without fundamentally altering them, funders need to adapt.**

## Movements in the Transparency and Accountability Ecosystem

This is the second in a three-part series initiated by the [Transparency and Accountability Initiative](#)'s TALEARN working group on social movements and state accountability. In TALEARN's [last global workshop](#) some participants asked: where are the movements? The Think Pieces in this series seek to answer that question.

### Funders Turn Toward Movements

The worldwide [revolutions](#) of 2011, and the more recent [backlash](#), have generated new funder interest in the role of social movements in shaping social and political change. In addition to this series of Think Pieces, the [United States Institute of Peace](#) (USIP) released a report proposing a “[movement mindset](#)” for civil society aid in February of this year and the [United States Agency for International Development](#) (USAID) recently held a research symposium on support for social movements. Private philanthropists are also taking notice. The [Women Donors Network](#) has commissioned a series of reports on “[social justice philanthropy](#)” that looks at means of supporting the grassroots of the reproductive

justice movement.

### A Social Movements' Perspective of Transparency and Accountability

The [first Think Piece](#) in this series asked challenging questions about the social movements gap in transparency and accountability theory:

“Individuals and groups use the state apparatus to control... privileges that would be eroded with more transparent and accountable systems.... What are their incentives for reforms?”

“How do citizens build the... ‘[countervailing power](#)’ that will bridge this gap” between the citizen and the state?”

“where are the movements?”

That Think Piece critiqued the state of current transparency and accountability support and pointed to social movements as an underappreciated actor within social accountability. This Think Piece will take the inverse approach, beginning from a movements perspective and asking what they can do for transparency and accountability.

Based on a literature review and 18 qualitative interviews with a range of funders and

activists from around the world, this Think Piece seeks to answer two questions:

1. How should we think about social movements?
2. What are movements' comparative advantage in contributing to transparency and accountability as opposed to the traditional actors?

## How to Think About Social Movements

### Movement Definitions

“Social movement” is a term that has a variety of definitions within the transparency and accountability community. Two interviewees from Southern Africa went so far as to define their own NGOs as social movements. Yet overall, the interviewees and academic literature coalesce around four characteristics:

2. Remedy Injustice: The organizations and individuals collaborate to remedy a systemic problem perceived as unjust by movement members. Movements can be progressive or conservative, reformative or revolutionary.
3. Grassroots Source: The core of the movement is “the people” - non-elites and non-technocrats who are directly affected by the injustice.
4. Substantial Scale: The movement must have substantial participation. (What constitutes “substantial” will differ from context to context.) Scale is made visible through mass tactics such as rallies, boycotts, sit-ins, and silent vigils.

*Movements engage in tactics and are composed of organizations. Yet they should not be confused with them.*

The subsidiary structural units of a social

1. Network Structure: A social movement is a network of organizations and individuals.

TERM	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
<b>Tactic</b>	A way of making demands that involves people and symbols	<u>Group lobbying of officials, religious processions, pilgrimages, and motorcades, wearing of symbols</u> (such as clothing of a particular color), <u>mass self-communication</u> (such re-tweeting movement-related hashtags on social media)
<b>Campaign</b>	A “ <u>highly energized, intensely focused, ... stream of activity with specific goals</u> ” composed of multiple tactics.	A presidential campaign, the campaign to pass a <u>Right to Information Act</u> in India, the campaign to provide better public services to the inhabitants of informal settlements in South Africa
<b>Organization</b>	A group of individuals that “ <u>further the interests of... members</u> ” and has some level of persistence in terms of individuals involved and aims pursued.	<u>SPARC</u> (India), <u>Community Defenders of the Right to Health</u> (Guatemala), <u>Millennial Activists United</u> (USA), <u>International Budget Partnership</u> (international)

The example in Table 2 illustrates how members of organizations engage in tactics that are part of a campaign, which is in turn part of a larger social movement.

TABLE 2: AN EXAMPLE FROM THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT	
TERM	EXAMPLE IN CONTEXT
<b>Campaign</b>	For equal access to public transportation in Montgomery, Alabama (USA)
<b>Tactics</b>	Included <a href="#">Montgomery bus boycott</a> (mass tactic), court case <a href="#">Browder v. Gayle</a> (elite tactic)
<b>Organization</b>	<a href="#">Montgomery Improvement Association</a> , which was created to lead the boycott; other pre-existing organizations, such as the <a href="#">NAACP</a> and <a href="#">Women's Political Council</a>
<b>Movement</b>	<a href="#">Civil Rights Movement</a> , which was composed of multiple organizations running multiple campaigns, the collective aim of which was (and is) to gain equal rights for black people in the United States.

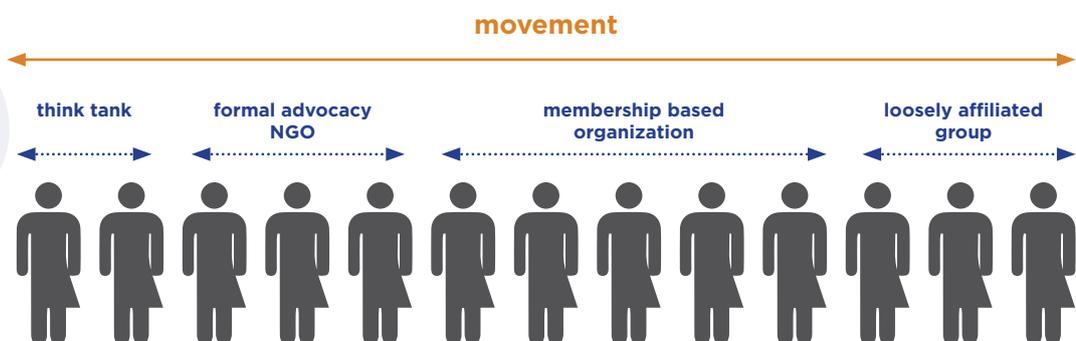
### The Organizational Complexity of Movements

The [first Think Piece](#) made a bold call to change the types of organizations that transparency and accountability funder's support:

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"Despite numerous and repeated calls to go 'beyond the usual suspects', disproportionate support has gone to professional NGOs that

A **movement** is a network of **organizations**.  
In 1 movement there are many organizations.\*



Within those **organizations**, individuals directly affected by injustice are the grassroots. An **organization** is grassroots to extent that it includes and empowers those directly affected.

\*The diagram does not include all the organizational types that can exist within a movement. It provides examples of common organizations.

often exist solely due to external funding, and not enough to the kinds of organizations, associations and movements that citizens themselves autonomously create and sustain. This situation can lead to an unbalanced and unrepresentative civil society '[monoculture](#)'."

Throughout the research process, a perception emerged among interviewees of two types of organizations that participate in movements: formal and informal. (see table 3 , below). Yet other interviewees challenged the binary view of movement organizations. Noted one employees of a Southern African accountability organization:

"I've heard those types of distinctions between formal and informal. When you look at real organizations and how things work on the ground, I've never been convinced that those distinctions really work.... On the one hand, we have a staff structure and a structure which, as you said, allows funder funding, annual financial statements.... But then on the other hand, in terms of the structure and the branches, we

are a deeply grassroots organization which is predominantly made up of people from the area directly affected.... Ours is in an example of more of a hybrid."

In other contexts grassroots organizations, composed of those directly affected by the injustice, are formal in character. An interviewee from Southeast Asia, who supported an anti-censorship movement through her academic institution, noted that all the movement organizations in that country were legally registered NGOs with professional staff.

"Funnily enough, I think the pressures of the climate here has forced the organizations involved in the social movement to become very good in terms of professionalizing their work.... A lot of the core activists are working at NGOs. They're very practiced in terms of writing funding bids and writing reports. Basically it's because they have never been able to get any money locally."

**TABLE 3: A BINARY VIEW OF MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS**

TERM	"FORMAL" ORGANIZATION	"INFORMAL" ORGANIZATION
<b>Nomenclature</b>	NGO, think tank	Association, grassroots organization, membership-based organization
<b>Legally Registered?</b>	Yes	Maybe
<b>Location</b>	Often based in the capital city	Could be based anywhere (rural areas, capital, small cities)
<b>Human Resources</b>	Staffed by paid professionals, technocrats with both policy and bureaucratic skills	Staffed by non-technocrats or volunteers, may lack bureaucratic and policy skills
<b>Representation</b>	Often claim to represent the interests of non-elites	Composed of non-elites acting in their own self-interest. They are directly affected by the injustices they seek to change.
<b>Mobilization Capacity</b>	Often lack the ability to mobilize citizens to take collective action	Often able to mobilize fellow citizens
<b>Funder Engagement</b>	Easily able to interface with the bureaucracies of grant-making bodies, as when applying for, managing, and reporting on grants	May have difficulty interfacing with the bureaucracies of grant-making bodies
<b>Appropriate Movement Role</b>	Technical support (research, expert media outreach, policy advising, logistical support)	Leadership (setting movement agenda, demands, and strategy), Tactical capacity (popular mobilization)

**TABLE 4: A VARIETY OF MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS?**

	“FORMAL” ORGANIZATION	“INFORMAL” ORGANIZATION	HYBRID ORGANIZATION	NO ORGANIZATION	OTHERS?
Registered with Government	✓		✓		
Paid Staff	✓		✓		
Interface Easily with Funders	✓		✓		
Mobilization Capacity		✓	✓	✓	
Citizens Represent Own Interests		✓	✓	✓	
Movement Role	SUPPORT	LEAD	LEAD	LEAD	
Example	A THINK THANK	AN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE’S ASSOCIATION	A LABOR UNION	LOCAL INSTANCES OF OCCUPY	

Importantly, an understanding of movement organizations needs to take into account the recent emergence of social movements without organizations. Notes [Tufekci](#):

“From the ‘Indignados’ in Spain, to ‘Occupy’ in the United States, from Tahrir Square in Egypt to Syntagma Square in Greece, from Gezi Park in Turkey to Euromaidan in Ukraine... none of these mobilizations had recognizable leaders or established spokespersons.... Rotating, flexible, ad hoc structures arose in response to perceived needs of the protests and took up functional roles which ebbed and flowed with the mobilization.”

This change is largely the result of technological changes in the enabling environment. [Bennett and Segerberg](#) coined the term “connective action” to describe this new type of mobilization in which individuals self-organize through social media. Traditional organizations, both “formal” and “informal,” may play no significant role. If traditional organizations are present, they take a back-seat to the organizing work of loosely-coordinated individuals. In addition, both “formal” and “informal” organizations can play a valuable role outside of the social movement context.

The features that have been divided cleanly among “formal” and “informal” can actually be combined in a number of ways, as shown in the table above.

This complexity is particularly important to funders since only two types of organizations (“formals” and certain types of hybrids) interface easily with funders using current procedures. For this reason, *funders interested in supporting these other kinds of organizations need to think about new forms of support and/or intermediaries* (more formal organizations that are specifically oriented towards supporting less formal movement organizations).

### What Movements Can Do for Transparency and Accountability

From the Arab Spring to the Anti-Retroviral Movement in South Africa, we see that social movements are increasing transparency and accountability around the world. But what comparative advantage do social movements offer? The following table summarizes them, simplifying and generalizing. Not all funded projects (nor all movements) fit in these neat boxes.

The sections below go into greater details about the three principal advantages of social movements in achieving transparency and accountability aims:

- Linking local claims
- Flexibility of tactics
- Mobilization capacity

**TABLE 5: THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT APPROACH**

	<b>PROJECT APPROACH</b>	<b>MOVEMENT APPROACH</b>
<b>Scope</b>	Activities are narrow, limited to a single organization or a small group of organizations in formal partnership.	Activities are linked to larger campaigns that incorporate the work of other organizations and individuals that move in and out of collaboration, sometimes without formal coordination.
<b>Timeframe</b>	Generally short-term, matching funding cycles that range from a few months to a few years.	Often long-term (ten years or more is standard).
<b>Participation</b>	Activities are carried out by NGO staff.	Activities are carried out by large groups of mobilized citizens.
<b>Autonomy</b>	Dependent on funders, so must be responsive to them.	Responsive to citizens for mobilization, legitimacy, and (often) funding. As a result they may be less responsive to funders.
<b>Influence</b>	Believe decision-makers will respond to rational and evidenced-based arguments about how to serve the public.	Believe decision-makers will only act against elite interests in the face of overwhelming pressure.
<b>Tactics</b>	Collect and present data and evidence supporting transparency and accountability claims.	Organize tactics that visibly and dramatically demonstrate popular support for a transparency or accountability aim.
<b>Style</b>	Polite, collaborative	<u>Unruly</u> , confrontational
<b>Flexibility</b>	Less flexible: Unlikely to deviate from prescribed interactions due to dependence on government (explained below).	More flexible: Will engage confrontationally to gain the access to decision-makers, yet can also engage collaboratively once access has been achieved.

**Linking the Local**

Movements have the potential to link together isolated expressions of a desire for change. They provide what Fox calls the “missing links between local community voice and national citizen policy/oversight.” This linking capacity is a function of the networked structure of movements, in which organizations from different regions - and even different parts of the globe - can work together around a set of common aims.

An interviewee from Central America works in this way. Though his academic center is based in the capital, the indigenous groups

he works with are largely rural. “We facilitate channels of engagement... between the state and... specific indigenous groups” he explains. “We don’t intend to speak on behalf of indigenous organizations.

**Flexibility of Tactics**

The network structure of movements is also the source of their tactical flexibility. As the interviewee from Central America noted, *social movements “transit between contestation and confrontation tactics to negotiation and collaborative engagement with State authorities.”*

“Formal” and “informal” organizations each have their own tactical advantages. Interviewees agreed that the role of “formal” organizations within social movements was limited to support functions. “From my perspective and experience, NGOs can do precious little for the transparency and accountability,” noted an NGO employee from South Asia. NGOs can “help in terms of research, help in terms of publishing, help in terms of giving logistical support to the movement, help in terms of transmitting their messages through a website.”

In the Central American example from the previous section, that help comes in the form of setting up meetings between indigenous groups and government officials. The organization also pays for travel and other logistical expenses of the “informal” organizations. It has set up a sophisticated monitoring and evaluation system and it disseminates the results so they can be implemented on the ground.

**The movement capacity of formal organizations is fundamentally limited by their dependence on the government.** The legal registration governments provide is a double-edged sword. It is a requirement for funding from most donors, yet it is also an effective means of control, steering formal NGOs to safer and less controversial tactics. If NGOs start substantially challenging the government, the South Asian NGO worker notes:

“Two things will happen: one, your funds will be stopped... secondly, because you are registered legally, you will be asked to close down your shop.... [For this reason] NGOs cannot lead transparency and accountability movements.”

Here, “informal” organizations have the advantage. Though their lack of legal registration limits their ability to receive funds from donors (at least using current procedures), it means they are not dependent on the government for their existence. Though informal organizations can be discouraged through violence and harassment, governments lack the easy bureaucratic sanctions that legal registration affords. Lack of legal registration becomes an asset in demanding government accountability, even as it is an obstacle in obtaining funding.

### Mobilization Capacity

Mobilization of popular support is a key tactic of social accountability. It is also a

capacity that elite NGOs often lack. One interviewee from an East African NGO went so far as to say “the government will always respond when the issues are coming from citizens.” Without that popular support, government may respond to transparency and accountability organizations “a bit, but the impact will be much less.”

**Citizens are mobilized by organizations they have a say in. They mobilize around organizations that share their priorities.** “Informals” are composed of citizens and are responsive to them. Their agendas are citizen agendas. They do not command action from on high. They request action in support of aims that citizen members have already identified as important to them.

For example, the hybrid organization from Southern Africa has an executive council composed of citizens that live in the informal settlements the organization advocates to improve. These council members play a role in the NGO’s decision-making process. Consistently seeking input from constituents is not easy. Yet it is the only way to ensure that the aims of mobilizee (citizen) and mobilizer (organization) are in sync.

Just as technology is changing the structure of movements, it is also changing the way citizens are mobilized, notes [Karpf](#). The table on the next page contrasts the traditional union approach to mobilizations to that of [MoveOn.org](#), a progressive multi-issue campaigning organization based in the United States. Though web-based organizing mobilizes more people, it usually mobilizes them to participate in less confrontational tactics. MoveOn is more likely to ask its members to sign an e-petition than to picket a business or march to the governor’s mansion.

### No Easy Answers

Newer does not always mean better and social movements do not provide a silver bullet. Notes one member of the TALEARN group:

“Social movements are struggling... to grapple with the complex challenges of politics and governance today. They continue to split largely due to dynamics among leaders.... Questions of legitimacy are raised against some of them.... Transparency and accountability in a few of these groups is also a question.... While social movements in the Philippines have been successful in effecting policy changes (reproductive health, IP rights, agrarian reform,

**TABLE 6: TWO MECHANISMS OF MOBILIZATION**

TERM	UNION APPROACH	MOVEON.ORG APPROACH
<b>Member Definition</b>	Individuals who pay <b>dues</b> are members.	Individuals who sign up for the organization's <b>email list</b> are members.
<b>Size</b>	<b>Thousands</b> of members	<b>Millions</b> of members
<b>Mechanism of Member Influence</b>	The <b>organizing process</b> (organizers shape campaigns based on member priorities); <b>election</b> of union leadership by members	<b>Online surveys</b> in which members select what issues are most important to them.
<b>Services to Members</b>	<b>Workplace support:</b> Negotiating workplace grievances, placing members in jobs.	No direct services, members receive a sense of <b>personal fulfillment</b> having acted on behalf of an issue they care about.
<b>Mobilize Where?</b>	Usually <b>offline</b> , in the form of strikes and pickets to pressure an employer, door-to-door canvassing on behalf of a candidate.	Usually <b>online</b> , particularly e-petitions to decision-makers.

environmental protection), the implementation of these policies has become a challenge.”

The purpose of this Think Piece is not to suggest that social movements can solve the problems of transparency and accountability, “as a new magic bullet”. Rather, we argue that any serious consideration of how to strengthen the ecosystem of accountability actors and mechanisms would be incomplete without them.

**Next Up: Supporting Social Movements**

If social movements have a role to play in achieving greater transparency and accountability, it is incumbent upon funders to consider ways to support them. Supporting social movements requires a network mindset that takes into account the comparative advantages of different types of organizations. It requires looking beyond the activities that are easiest to fund to the activities that are most likely to bring about change. It means potentially changing the way funding works so that funding institutions, which are durable and hierarchical, can support movements, which are flexible, flat, and composed of non-elites. Without this change, movements will be forced to become more like funders in order to accept support, losing the resilient plasticity and popular participation that make them effective.

The final Think Piece in this series will explore the challenges - and proposed steps forward - for supporting social movements.

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