

# Understanding Movements & Why They Matter

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# What is a Movement?

*An organized set of people vested in  
making a change in their situation  
("constituents") pursuing a common  
political agenda through collective  
action.*

# Key characteristics of movements:

- An organized membership or constituency base – the individuals or communities most vested in the change
- Organizational substructures – either formal or informal – networks, organizations, member collectives, etc. – which create the infrastructure for participation, representation and decision-making
- A political agenda – common analysis, goals, targets for change
- Leadership from the constituency at multiple levels – i.e., not entirely dependent on external leadership

# Key characteristics of movements:

- Collective actions in pursuit of common goals, to advance their political agenda
- Some continuity over time – not just a spontaneous short-term uprising or campaign
- Strategies of engagement and contestation – i.e., from marches, protests, demonstrations to advocacy & lobbying, to even alliances and partnerships. These strategies are manifestations of the movement's struggle to achieve its political agenda.

\*

# But let's remember that...

- Reactionary or fundamentalist movements are very similar in characteristics
- So how are they different from our movements?
  - They do not subscribe to the full body of human rights
  - They do not always accept women's right to equality, the rights of all sexual identities, or equality based on religion, ethnicity, race, caste, etc.

# What is a women's movement?

A movement with all the characteristics described earlier, but

- Whose constituency base is primarily women
- Whose leadership is usually also mainly by women
- Whose political agenda is usually framed around meeting the *practical needs of women* – for services, resources, or even justice – but not founded in a feminist analysis of patriarchy and the its intersection with other power structures

# What is a feminist movement?

- Consciously embraces feminist values, ideology, analytical frameworks and methods – e.g., the agenda is based on a *feminist analysis* of the problem or situation they are seeking to change – think of an example!
- Has feminist political goals - they seek a change that goes beyond practical needs, focusing on challenging the ideologies (like patriarchy) that justify gender discrimination, and transforming the structures of both gender and social power relations – think of an example!

# How do movements begin?

- Through a spark that ignites outrage -
- Through conscious movement-building processes
- Through the networking of organizations working on a particular issue or change agenda
- Through the morphing of campaigns / uprisings into more long-term political agendas of change
- A combination of the above???

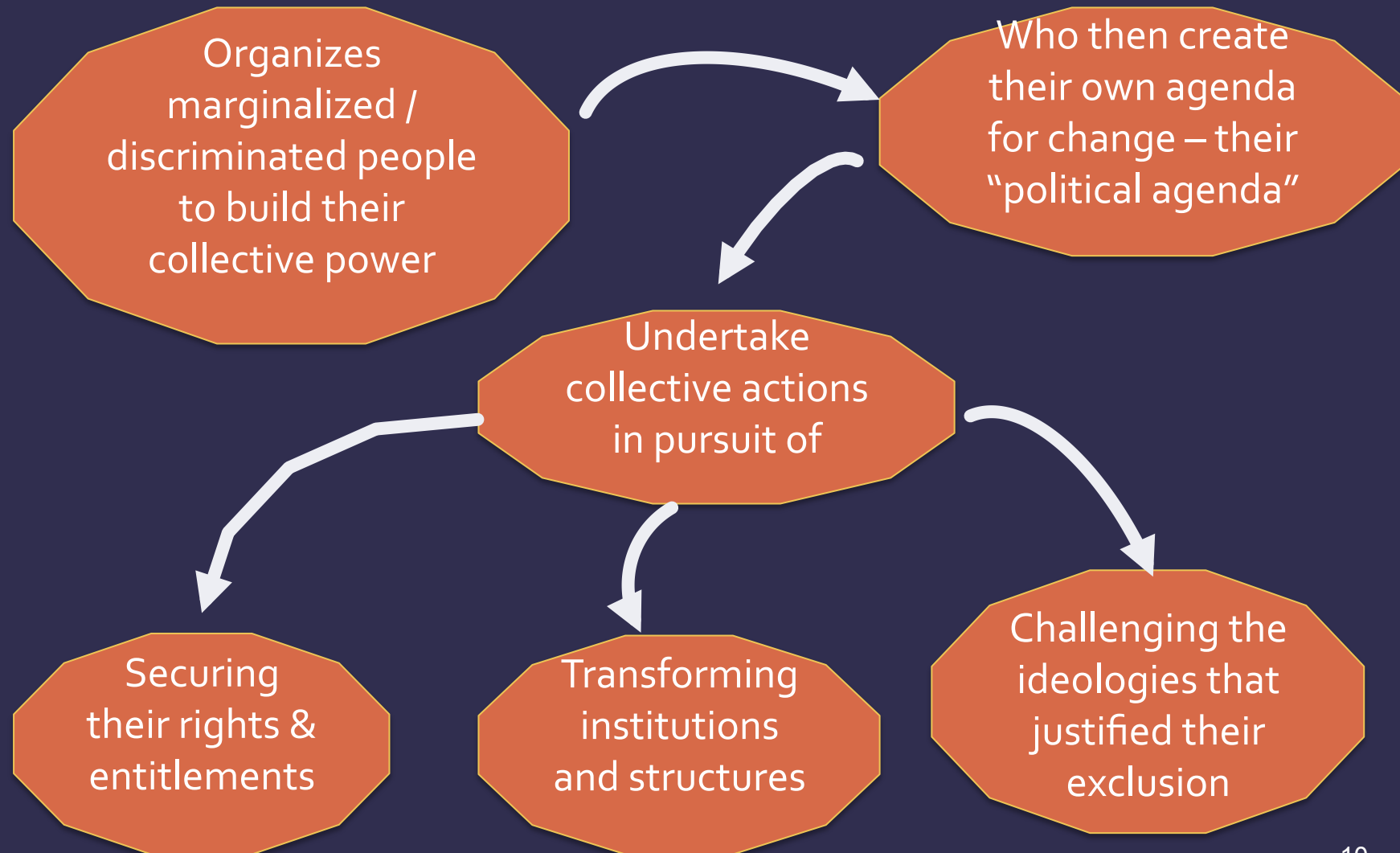


If this is what a movement is...

# WHAT IS MOVEMENT BUILDING?

# What is *Movement Building*?

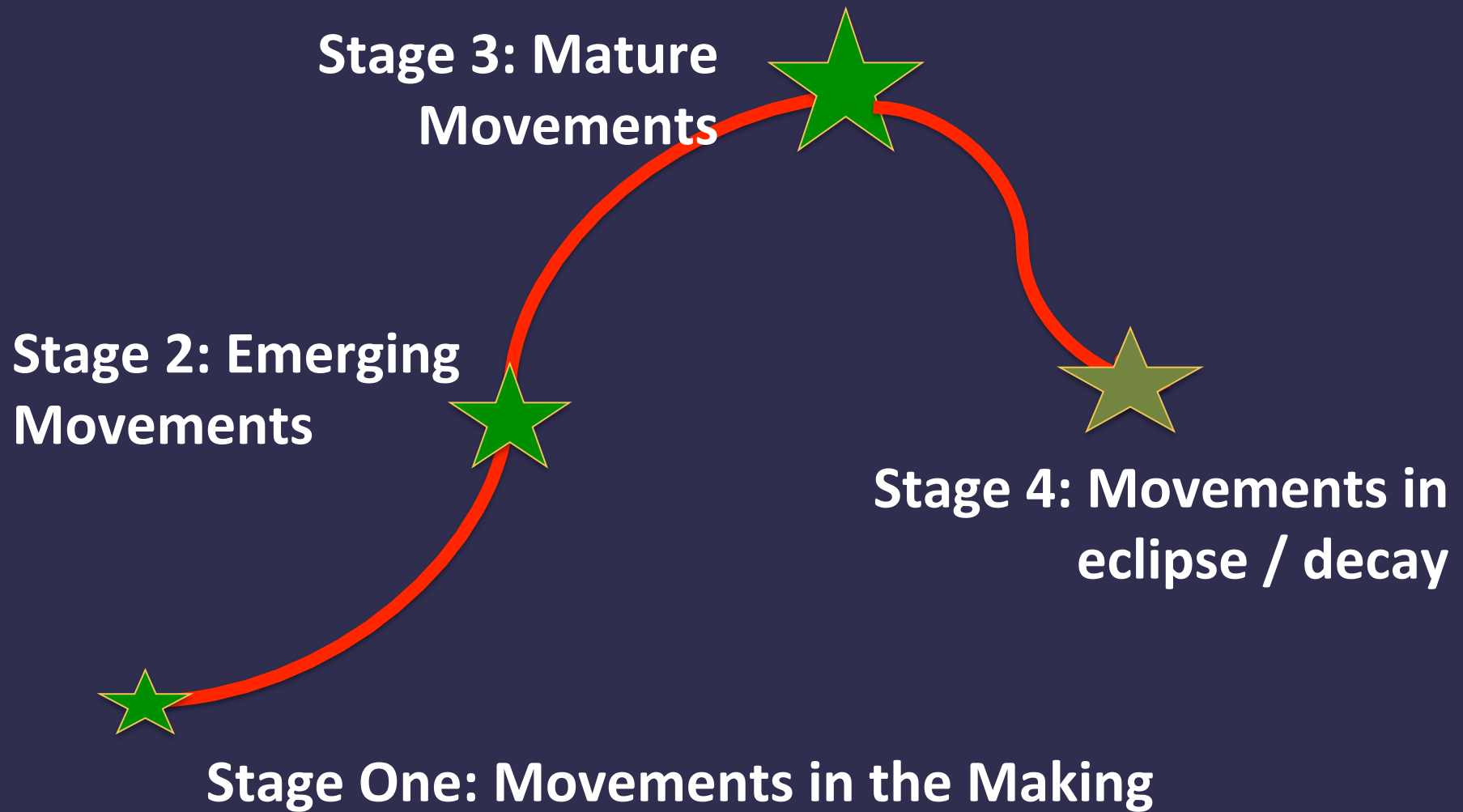
..... a process that:



# Steps in Movement Building



# Stages of Movement Evolution



# Characteristics of Movements in the Making

- Mobilization, awareness and identity building
- Rising political consciousness and issue/s identification
- Preliminary political agenda
- Tentative actions for change
- Nascent constituency-based leadership
- Higher dependence on support organization

# Characteristics of Emerging Movements

- Steady and sustained membership base
- Higher political consciousness and evolving Organizational structure
- Longer-term political agenda and change strategies
- Internal leadership and decision-making structures and systems
- Relationships with growing range of allies
- Greater autonomy vis-à-vis support organization/s
- Increasing visible impacts on society, discourses, policy, law, community etc., including backlashes and setbacks

# Characteristics of Mature Movements

- Strong and sustained membership base consciously identifying with the movement
- Strong autonomous organizational and governance structure
- Extensive and deep leadership
- Sophisticated analysis, strategies, political acumen
- High measurable impact on state and non-state actors, and society at large
- Strategic alliances and adversaries

# Characteristics of Movements in Decline

- Stagnant or declining membership base
- Rigid political analysis / agenda that has lost relevance and appeal
- Static strategies and actions with limited or declining impact
- Loss of issue focus / change of political / economic / social environment and imperatives / Change of historic moment
- Aging out – of leadership, agenda, membership, etc.
- Rise of other movements



# What's new - the changing shape of movements<sup>1</sup>:

- The importance of the local remains as movements are created and shaped by specific local contexts - but the opportunities for transnational activism shapes the way movements are emerging...
- Movements are shaping up around a core surrounded by circles of looser connections (especially virtual circles) that reach out to wider social fields that engage millions of people....
- Movements in this sense are part of what have been called “meshworks”<sup>2</sup> that move in and out of strategic spaces....

1. Harcourt, W. (2012), Editorial: The Challenge of Civil Action for Development, *Development Journal of SID*, 55(2), 151-153,

2. Escobar, A. (2004), Beyond the Third World: imperial globality, global coloniality and anti-globalisation social movements, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.25, No.1, P.210

# What's new - the changing shape of movements\*:

- These new movement formations around the Arab revolution, the Occupy movement and civic protests, open up interesting questions around how social movements are now operating, as the deep structures of traditional social movements are being challenged.
- The new formations are trying to make visible the invisible informal decision making processes that lead to cliques taking over or exercising informal power.
- They are trying to revalue and measure power within movements, recognizing the hidden versus the formal structure and the need to work through and mediate and resolve tensions.

# Even when movements die or seem to have failed, it's important to remember that:

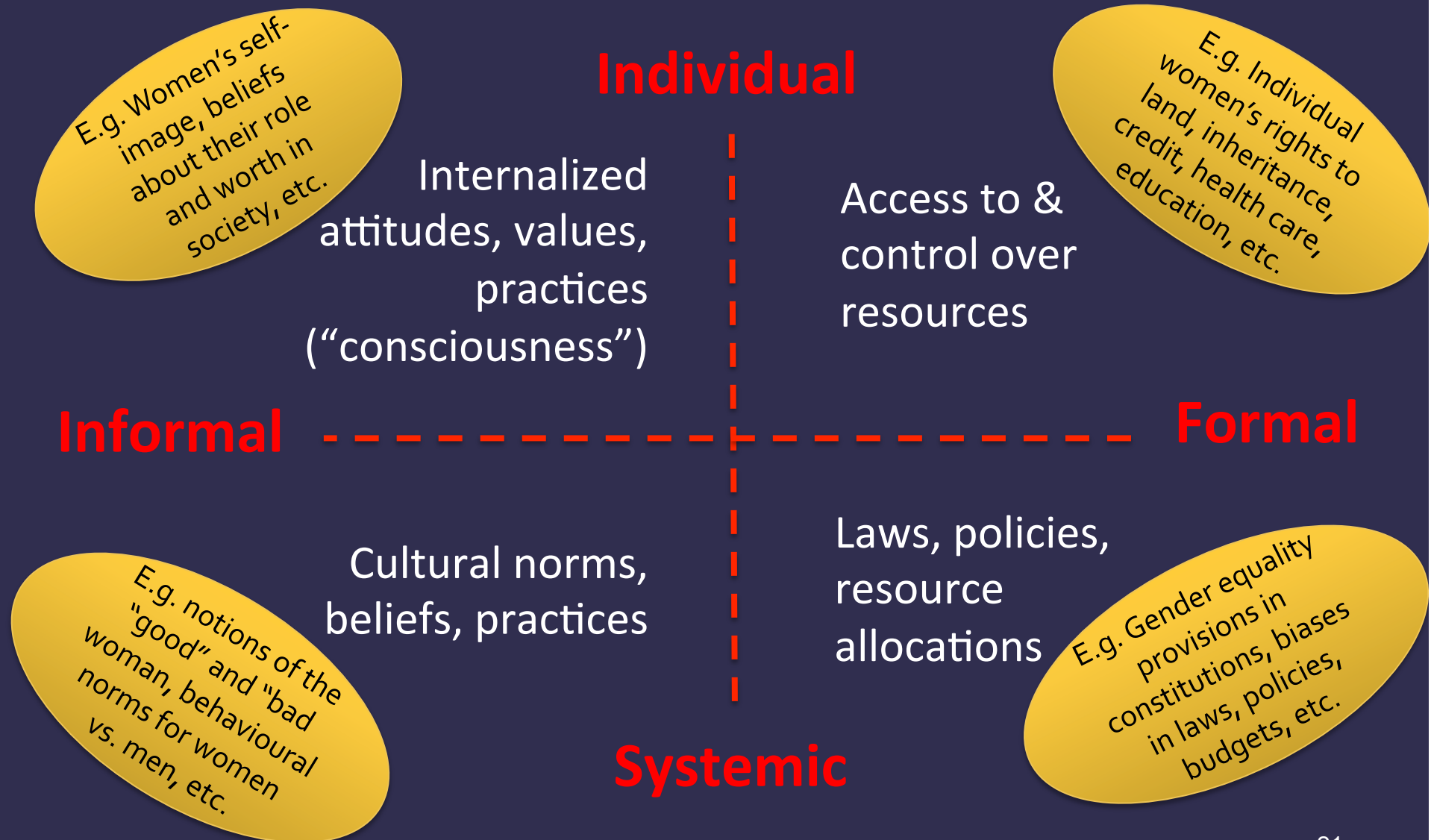
- "The first thing to get out of the way is that virtue always triumphs; in truth most attempts to confront and defeat misdeeds are only partially successful or else seem to outright failures. It doesn't matter. Nothing is wasted in the universe. Even an effort that apparently goes nowhere will influence the future. Though the system looks untouched, it has a fatal crack in it. The next assault or the one after that will bring it down. At the very least someone somewhere has learned a lesson and will be more thoughtful."  
(the late Canadian Feminist, June Callwood)

That's very interesting, but...

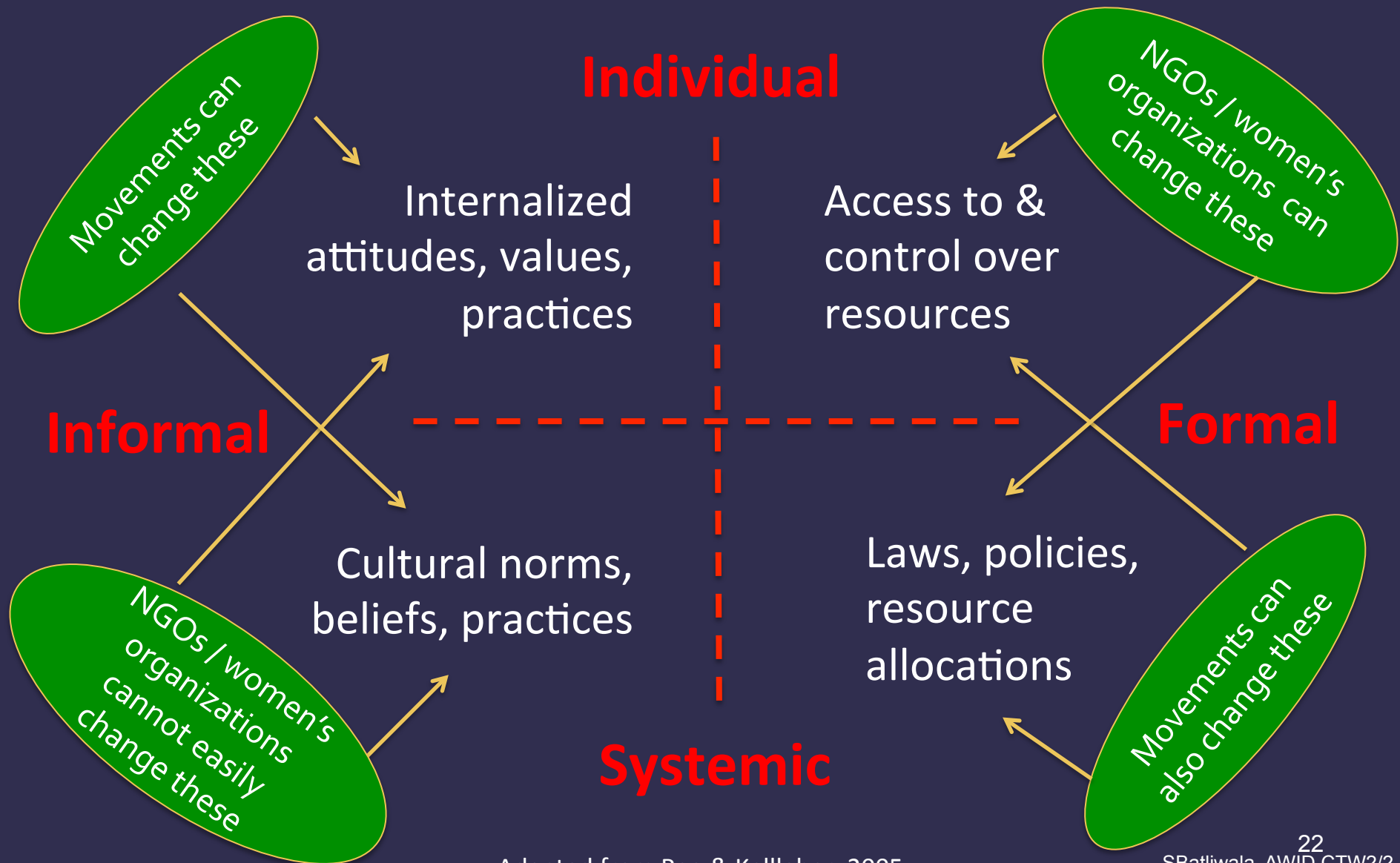
**Why do movements matter  
so much?**

**Can't NGOs and women's  
organizations achieve the  
same results?**

# The four domains of gendered power that must be addressed to achieve gender or social justice:



# Why Movements Matter are Critical for Social Transformation



Adapted from Rao & Kelleher, 2005

# Why Movements Matter:

- *“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 table is the other. But 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 wont 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 this part of the world [South Africa].”*

- EVERJOICE WIN



**So Movements Matter because:**  
they can bring down multiple barriers, create change in both formal and informal norms and exclusionary structures, and sustain change over time!



# But Movements have “Deep Structures”

These hidden, often invisible and “normalized” biases and dynamics can make movements exclusionary or blind to other forms of injustice that they perpetuate...

**Unstated  
norms / biases**

**Implicit culture /  
values**

**Informal sites  
of power &  
Influence**

**Invisible boundaries /  
exclusions**

# Social justice movements are microcosms of the societies in which they emerge

- Many supposedly progressive movements have historically been discriminatory toward women, people of colour, certain ethnic and religious identities, non-heterosexuals, etc.
- Even today, many movements do not prioritise gender issues or women's rights
- Similarly, many women's movements have been either consciously or unthinkingly exclusionary to women of particular identities....

# What enables or disables movement building?

Internal and external factors...

# External factors that constrain movement building / emergence:

- Absence of democratic rights – especially freedom of speech, assembly, “association” rights
- Loss of state control – regions where extra-state actors are in control and repress any but their own movements
- Conditions of severe political / economic upheaval and physical insecurity – war, civil conflict, occupation, cause disruption of civic life, making movement building more challenging
- ‘NGOization’ – resulting in narrow issue, project, or service focus / lack of broader political analysis
- Exclusion / marginalization by other movements – e.g., disabled women, sex workers, lesbian women, their interests and priorities, are often excluded by women’s movements or other social movements

# Internal factors constraining movement building

- Lack of or weak base - movements built from above, by external agencies / leaders, with low attention to mobilizing / organizing the constituency
- Resource constraints
  - cannot meet members' demands for services or training, especially at the initial movement-building phase
  - Lack of donor support for hard-to-measure movement-building work
  - Donor interference or control of organization's activities
- Co-option / repression – “hyper-alignment” with other actors (e.g., trade unions or political parties), resulting in losing their autonomy and political power

# Internal factors constraining movement building

- Lack of internal democracy - movements built from above, by external agencies / leaders, with low attention to mobilizing / organizing the constituency
- Lack of leadership layers - cannot meet members' demands for services or training, especially at the initial movement-building phase
- Lack of generational depth in leadership and membership
- Stagnation of political analysis and strategies

# Insights from the AWID study of women's movements

14 women's movements from over 20 countries and  
8 regions of the world, and 1 global movement

# Key elements of effective feminist movement building:

1. Consciousness-raising / awareness-building
2. Organizing and building a strong mass base
3. Clear power analysis and political agenda
4. Spiraling growth through dynamic learning: action-reflection-action-impact
5. Building new knowledge and knowledge politics
6. Focus on changes at both formal (policy, law, etc.) and substantive (attitudes, behaviour, norms) levels
7. Experimenting with changing the practice of power internally and externally



# Key features of strong women's movements:

- Leadership from the primary constituency / “mass base”
- Relatively autonomous (not entirely donor-driven or aligned to a political party or patronage group)
- Clear and transparent hierarchies of leadership, communication and decision-making
- Clear political agendas, change goals, and targets
- Withstanding ebbs and flows – surviving both moments of reversal as well as advancement