PEOPLE, POWER AND CHANGE

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Session Objectives

- Deepen our understanding of power and its dynamics

- Understand the relationship between power and social change

People and Power

- **Increasingly the notion of power is being adopted by many different players (from the most progressive to the most conservative) in their attempts to develop more influential and compelling advocacy strategies**

- Yet it is often understood and applied in a one dimensional way that does not reflect its different forms and complexities.

- **If we are not clear about what we mean, the concept runs the risk of turning into empty jargon and losing its ability to help strengthen advocacy efforts, organisations and social change strategies**

- **There is a tendency to view power almost exclusively in sinister or oppressive terms and as a force that is monolithic. Such a perception of power can paralyse people since it seems to indicate there is no hope for change**

People and Power

- Power is not static, but rather constantly shifting and changing, providing opportunities for action

- Power is not also intrinsically negative or positive. Its value depends on how it is structured and used in each context

- For some it may mean control and coercion, but for others it means the capacity to fight for justice

Unpacking Power

- To unpack and understand power, it helps to think about the following points:

  - **Power is everywhere:** It operates both negatively and positively at many levels, in public and private, in the workplace, market and family, in relations with friends and colleagues and even at a very personal level within each individual.

  - **Power is dynamic and multidimensional:** It is never dormant or immovable but shifts according to context, circumstance and interest. These changing dynamics of power form cracks in oppressive systems that can be expanded and used as entry points for action.

□ **Power is always relational.** Power is established and exercised through human interaction at many different levels ranging from the interpersonal to the global. In each situation, the dynamics of power (who has *power over* others, who can build *power with*, who can exercise their *power to*, who can feel *powerful within* or not) is defined within each context and each relationship.

Power and Social Change

- In a broad sense, social change is happening constantly, everywhere. It is driven by different forces and interests, from political ideology to technological innovation, from social movements and multinational corporations to new generations of young people who promote changes in culture and behaviour

- The type of social change we seek will only be viable in the long term if it changes the balance of power in our societies and transforms inequitable access to rights and resources. This means it needs to promote the empowerment of people, in particular the poor and excluded, as agents of change and full and active members of society

Framework for Social Change
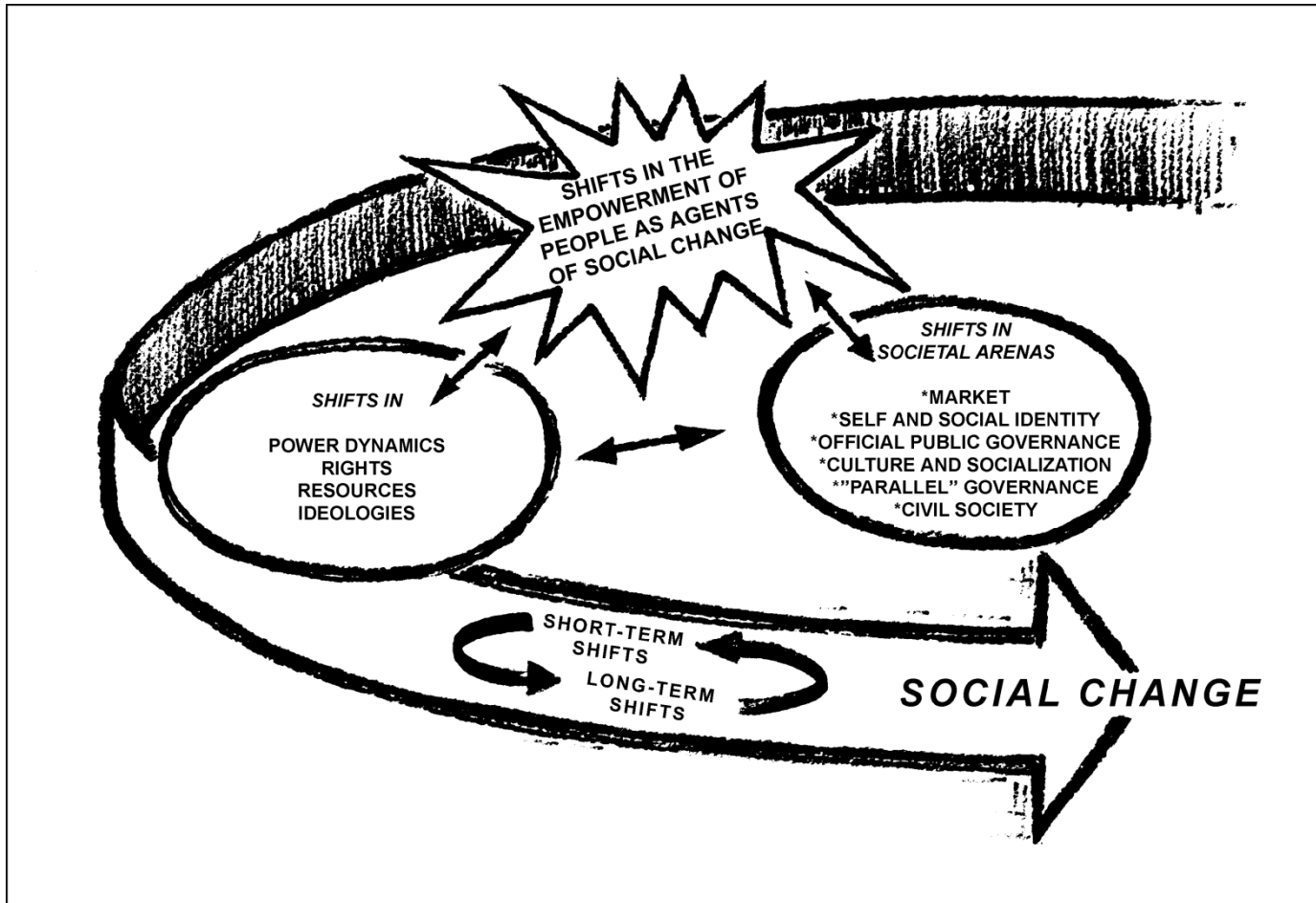
Empowerment and Collective Action

- Strengthening collective action and people's participation is at the core of our vision for social change as shown in the starburst diagram.

- This makes individual and group empowerment a key element of advocacy work.

- The engagement of excluded groups in arenas of public debate and decision making begins to challenge historic domination by a few and reinforce the concept that all people, in particular the excluded, are citizens with rights and responsibilities.

- Strengthening their collective action and empowerment should always be a crucial strategy within people-centred advocacy

SOCIETAL ARENAS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AND ACTION

- As indicated in earlier, shifts are needed in various societal arenas in order to achieve and sustain change that benefits the poor and marginalised and transforms power relations. These include:

  - **Official public governance**: changes in unjust laws and policies and in public institutions responsible for implementing those changes.

  - **Parallel governance**: changes in the "parallel" and unofficial structures of power and decision-making which affect people's lives. e.g. traditional Institutions

Societal Arenas ...

- **Market:** changes in the capitalist market system to counter the way it works to concentrate wealth, power and resources.

- **Civil society**: changes in the organisations of the poor and excluded and in organisations that support them – in their strength, their leadership, their ability to collaborate with others and in members' capacity and attitudes.

- **Culture and socialisation**: changes in processes of socialisation and overall societal values and beliefs that support and reproduce inequality and discrimination.

- **Self and social identity**: changes in people's lives – e.g. their ability to earn a fair living, get an education, and their sense of individual and collective self-worth and rights and responsibilities.

SHIFTS IN POWER DYNAMICS, RIGHTS AND RESOURCES, AND IDEOLOGIES

☐ On the left of the framework we show what needs to change: power dynamics, access to rights, resources, and ideologies. Here the following dimensions need to be taken into account:

  ☐ **Shifts in power dynamics** to break the structures of dominance and impoverishment, changes in all the ways power operates: shaping norms, values and consciousness; shaping the political agenda; determining whose voice is heard; and, framing formal decision making and implementation of public policies.

  ☐ **Shifts in rights and resources** to guarantee quality of life and political participation of the poor and excluded. changes in people's ability to access, exercise and control these at all levels - - social, cultural, economical, political.

  ☐ **Shifts in the ideologies** that reinforce inequities in order to provide new direction for thinking and action, changes that challenge belief systems such as patriarchy and neo-liberalism and develop alternative world views.
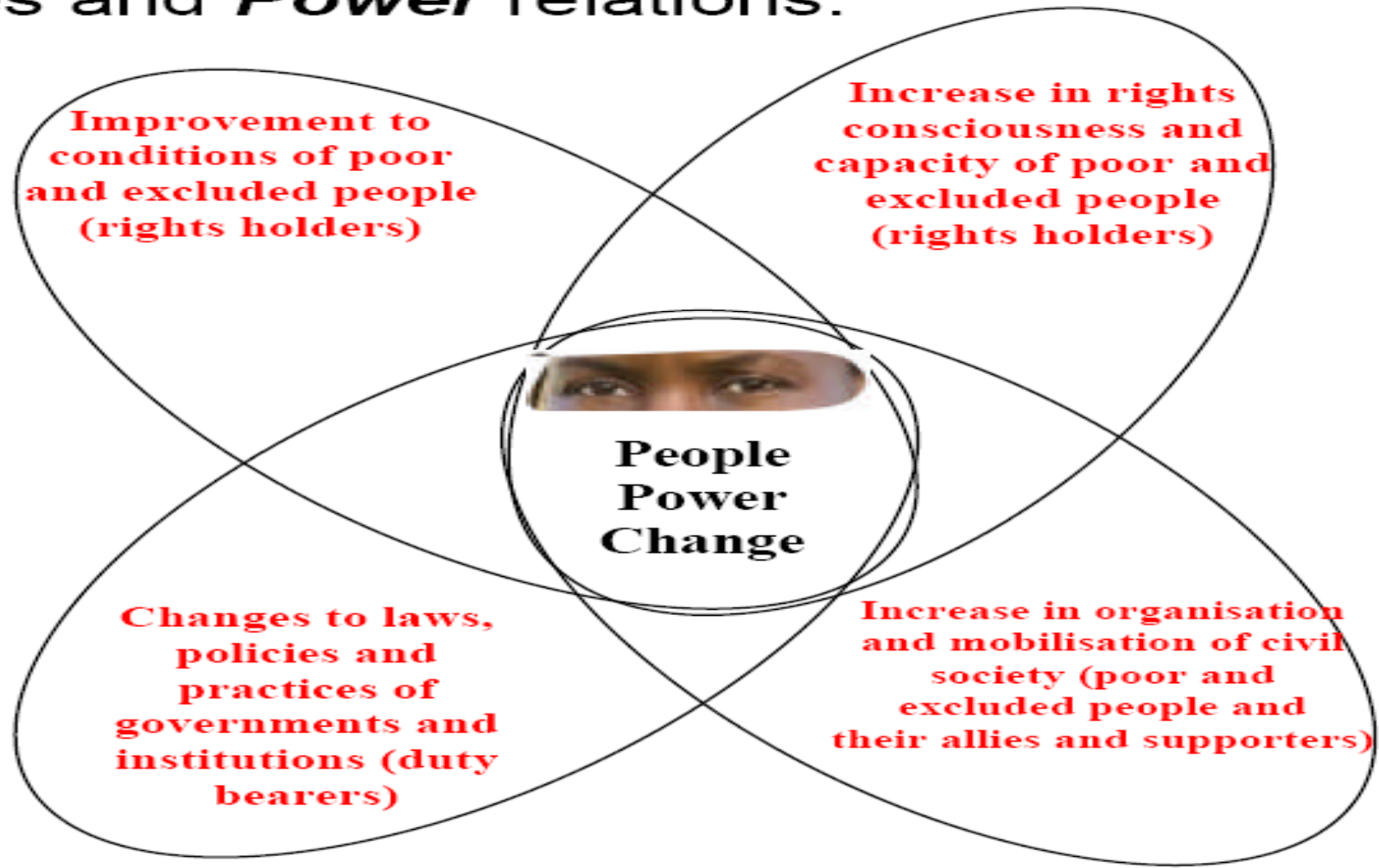
LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM SHIFTS

- **The major changes** we want to achieve in our work will undoubtedly take a long time. They build on smaller changes that occur as we take action. Our framework illustrates this political process in which long and short time frames are interconnected.

- **The long-term shifts correspond** to our vision that another world is possible, where the root dynamics of social injustice no longer block the guarantee of rights.

- **Short-term changes** can be seen as the strategic steps that open doors and create bridges for the long-term achievement of our aims.

- **While they may seem small** in the short run, these need to be recognised and celebrated as hopeful signs and important milestones on the long journey towards justice.

Change is Disconcerting and not Neutral

- To achieve a better world we need to challenge and change the current dynamics and structures of domination and inequality in both public and private arenas.

- We need to take sides and build active solidarity with groups suffering the denial of their rights and the violence of social injustice.

- The promotion of social justice is not a synonym for peace building, when peace building denies conflict or ignores power relations. It is a political process that works to transform inequitable forms of power, open to different levels of tension and conflict, which will vary in every context of advocacy.

- Of course, we must try not to provoke unnecessary backlash or put ourselves or others in unnecessary danger.

Change and Power web

es and *Power* relations.

Improvement to conditions of poor and excluded people (rights holders)

Increase in rights consciousness and capacity of poor and excluded people (rights holders)

People Power Change

Changes to laws, policies and practices of governments and institutions (duty bearers)

Increase in organisation and mobilisation of civil society (poor and excluded people and their allies and supporters)

Thank You

"What history really shows is that today's empire is tomorrow's ashes, that nothing lasts forever, and that to not resist is to acquiesce in your own oppression. The greatest form of sanity that anyone can exercise is to resist that force that is trying to repress, oppress, and fight down the human spirit".

- **Mumia Abu-Jamal, African American activist and journalist, USA. Currently facing death penalty convicted of a crime he denies**